SEPTEMBER

Weird Tales

ANC

"Rapport"

MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

25c

"Gimlet Eye Gunn"

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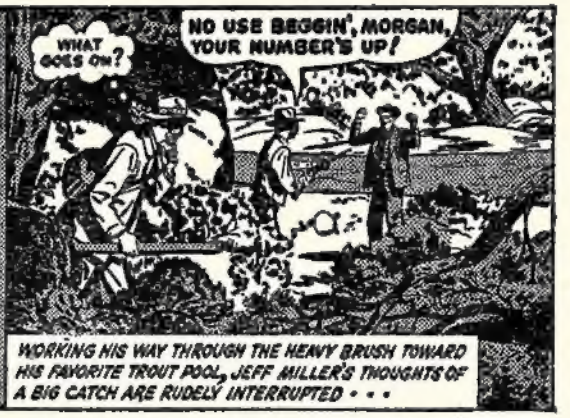

WORKING HIS WAY THROUGH THE HEAVY BRUSH TOWARD HIS FAVORITE TROUT POOL, JEFF MILLER'S THOUGHTS OF A BIG CATCH ARE RUDELY INTERRUPTED . . .

SEPTEMBER, 1951 Cover by Lee Brown Coye

NOVELETTES

GIMLET EYE GUNN . . . . . H. Bedford-Jones 8

Pete Larsen knew well enough that air personnel had often been forced to land on remote tropical islands. But he hadn't thought to ask if any of them were haunted.

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF EARTH . . . . . Clark Ashton Smith 62

Such a process must inevitably be slow and gradual; inland areas will change first, then eventually the seas themselves will be attacked—life as we know it will vanish.

SHORT STORIES

RAPPORT . . . . . Mary Elizabeth Counselman 38

Marco the Mentalist, what a strange thing it was that he of all men was to learn that there was such a thing as thought transference, after all.

THE RING OF BASTET . . . . . Seabury Quinn 46

A strange humming, bestial note, a growling sound, issued from the lips of a normal, healthy—and happy—young woman. . . .

CAMEL VENGEANCE . . . . . Garnett Radcliffe 56

. . . a devilish sound—as if camels were laughing among the ghouls of the desert darkness.

CHURCH IN THE JUNGLES . . . . . Arthur J. Burks 80

. . . I had played the fool as so many adventurers do; I roamed alone into the Central Brazilian jungles. The story of how I got out was one that never could be written.

A SQUARE OF CANVAS . . . . . Anthony M. Rud 83

"Listen, Madame; I am not mad. Would a true story of an artist's persecution interest you?"

THE EYRIE 6

VERSE

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WEIRD CROSSWORD . . . . . Charles A. Kennedy 79

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D. McILWRAITH, *Editor*

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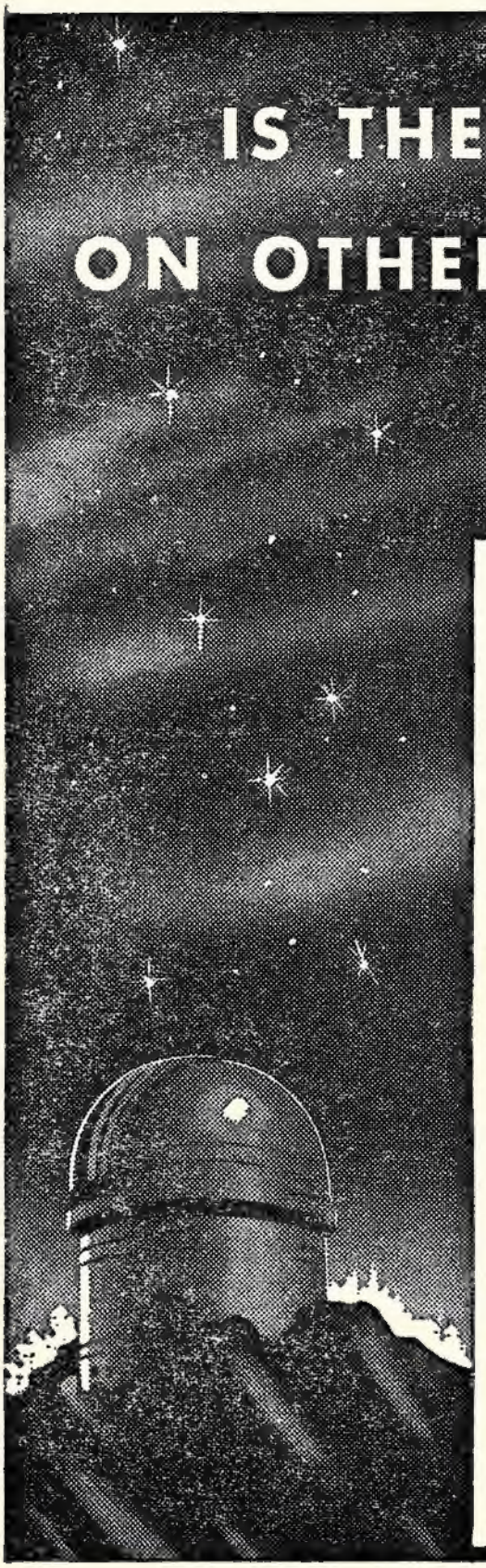

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THE EYRIE

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I am subscribing to WEIRD TALES *again in spite of my objections to your continued publication of "science fiction," so-called. I cannot see any relationship whatever between "weird" tales in the proper sense, that is, tales having their foundation in the preternatural, diabolism, witchcraft, etc., and "science fiction," which appears based upon an entirely natural and non-weird concept of what things will be like henceforth and hereafter, or what may go on among the Plutonians. The singular combination of actual weird fiction and scientific conjecture results from a failure to comprehend the distinction between the naturally strange or hypothetical, i.e., the aforesaid mores of the Plutonians, and the preternaturally strange "ghoulies and ghosties" of proper weird fiction. The former is best represented by H. G. Wells' tolerably good tale, "The War of the Worlds," the latter by authors such as M. R. James, Algernon Blackwood, Roger Pater, J. Sheridan Le Faun, and H. P. Lovecraft. Generally writers who attempt to write in both fields do poorly at both, and magazines which miss the distinction noted above are likely, sooner or later, to find themselves publishing only science fiction, because they will lose the support of the lover of the preternaturally fantastic.*

Please do not attempt to pass off scientific gobbledegook as "weird." The magazines which specialize in S. F. are not weird but they do succeed in appealing, with excruciatingly mathematical and technical accuracy, perhaps, to a little coterie which has nothing whatever in common with the inveterate fan of ghost stories and occult literature. Let us not equate Brick Bradford with John Silence. You cannot reduce the Ghost of Glamis Castle to a scientific equation.

Joseph V. Wilcox.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I always look forward to getting the new WEIRD TALES. *The quality of the stories is usually good, although the ghost yarns are getting to be a bit stereotyped. The purpose of this letter is, however, to let me make a bundle of suggestions concerning W. T. (which would probably make the magazine go broke if carried out).*

What-I-Would-Do-If-I-Was-Editor Dept.:

1. I'd increase the mag's size, as no self-respecting science-fantasy magazine should charge a quarter for under 100 pages of material.

2. I'd make the Eyrie much larger.

3. I'd print more humorous fantasy. The "eldrich horror" and "punch ending" types of stories are not the only possibilities in fantasy.

4. I'd improve the covers. Those ghoulish canvases probably scare away plenty of readers.

5. I'd attempt to liven up the inside—more and better illustrations, etc.

There are many other things I'd like to see done, but they slip my mind at present. Please continue to run at least one science-fiction story an issue, as you have been doing. I won't go into the time-worn spiel about

(Continued on page 95)

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Gimlet Eye Gunn

By H. Bedford-Jones

I

IT IS all right to tell this yarn as is long after the war, it may be made a bit more credible to the average person. Even now, admittedly, it is more than a trifle staggering, even though well vouched for. Since it is not a war story, however, and does not have to be written to get past the censor, suppose we take a gander at it.

Larsen came to this country from Norway,

Heading by Fred Humiston

at five years of age, was eighteen when he got into the war, and was twenty-one when he started to invade the Philippines with MacArthur, though MacArthur was not aware of it, because Larsen was only the tail-gunner in a bomber that went haywire.

The reason she went haywire that afternoon was that she caught a terrific dose of flak. This was in the hot naval business outside Leyte. When the communications went dead, Larsen knew the worst must have happened, and it had. He had been washed out as a pilot before going into gunnery, and knew his way around a bit, but when he made his way forward he was appalled. She had taken everything there was to take, apparently, and he waded through a bloody mess that left him reeling. He was the only soul alive.

By the time he had pulled what remained of the pilot and co-pilot off the controls he was shaken and trembly, and no wonder. The ship was going like a bat out of hell, but in a fluttery sort of way that showed she would not hold together long; she was at five thousand feet, luckily, but was losing altitude, with wings and fuselage ripped all to helngone. The radio was dead. When he discovered this, Larsen looked around to see where he was; but he had been going five miles a minute and there was nothing in sight. He stared down blankly, with a sense of panic. Leyte gone—the smoke of the burning carrier gone—everything gone!

Dripping blood over the sea, the bomber flew on with Larsen paralyzed at the controls. The sea-surface told him he was graiually dropping, but the instruments were dead like everything else on board. Larsen had on his parachute and might have taken to it and a rubber boat in case of fire, but there was no fire, and he had heard a lot about sharks. He stayed where he was and hoped against hope, straining his eyes at the horizon.

Then, off to the south—at least, he

After all, there had *been pirates in those seas before the Japs got there*

thought from the sun that it must be south, though it was not—he saw a blue land-loom, and frantically headed the bomber for it. He cut down the engines, and a good thing he did, for the wings were shaking to pieces. Also, he got his parachute and other essentials ready; it looked like he might have to jump at any instant, to judge by the vibration. His pockets were crammed with cigarettes and chocolate bars and other stuff he had taken aboard at the last minute and had not touched, but he dared not try to get rid of the weight now. Besides, he might need it all.

The dying bomber thundered onward, alone in the empty sky. The blue shadow grew against the sea-edge like a gob of goo on a bayonet, but he knew he was not going to make it, because the shimmering waves below were coming close. The bombs! They were still in the bay. He found the electric release and pressed the button. He could feel the upward thrust at once, as the doors opened and the bombs fell away, but he did not look back. He had picked up something else, dead ahead.

This was an island, a small one with two peaks sticking up out of the water, well this side of the blue coast beyond. He came closer; there was nothing to the patch of island except the two peaks and a depression between them, but it was a life-saver. The peaks could not be more than a few hundred feet high—he was not above them, but on a level with them. But he could see a fringing reef, and it looked ugly as the surf broke over it.

Then his heart skipped a beat, as the sea reached up and clutched at him—almost down! Desperately, he set the gyro pilot and it took hold. He scrambled aft. The bomb bay was still open; he dumped out corpses, ammunition cans, anything he could find. The ship rose a little, but she was not going to make the island.

Like everyone in the service, he had received a thorough course in ditching drill, but drill was far different from the present circumstances; and he did not intend to wait till the bomber struck. As he inflated his Mae West, he eyed the shoreline inside the wide lagoon formed by the reef. He wanted to get out before she hit, and there was no need of a parachute now; he had just time to shed it.

The line of reef was rushing at him; she was barely going to clear it. Already the waves were lapping up at her. He opened the hatch and stood ready. She was over the reef and past it, fuselage right on the water —then he pulled the dinghy release and jumped, a bare instant before she struck her tail and plunged under in a huge shower of spray.

THE dinghy inflated itself, and when he came clear, the rubber craft was floating at a little distance. He swam to it and did not try to get aboard; he just hung on and kicked, and the white beach came close. All sign of the bomber had vanished.

Before he knew it, Larsen touched bottom and came crawling out to the white sand, where a thousand sandfleas went jumping and skipping in all directions. He pulled the rubber doughnut up after him, then staggered on toward the trees, and went to pieces in total collapse, and dropped.

It had been early morning when he got here. He did not waken until well along in the afternoon. He blinked, sat up, and stared around, bewildered.

Everything came back to him of itself. There was nothing to suggest it in sight except the rubber boat on the sand. Not a trace of the bomber. He sat for a while staring frowningly at the water, then looked around. He got out of his flying clothes, now dry, found a cigarette packet, and in the center located a smoke that was not brown and ruined, and got it alight, spreading out the others on the sand. He emptied his pockets and looked at his watch. Not watertight, it had stopped; he set it by guess at four o'clock.

The cigarette gone, he got up and went to the dinghy. The compartments were stocked with rations and needfuls; cigarettes, too, thank Uncle Sam! He got everything out and hid the packets under the trees, then went back and stared at the white coral sand. Someone else was or had been here, for the marks were plain. Except in stories and wet sand, footprints do not show up as such;

he could make nothing of these, and went to the creek. Here he drank long and thirstily.

"No reception party on hand," he observed aloud, and squinted up at the two small peaks. These were of bare rock, but below them trees were thick. Shouting, he gained no response, so he started up the creek by a well-traveled path that appeared.

Within a few hundred feet, he was looking around in utter amazement. He came upon a big canoe, helpless for use, with a huge hole in its bottom. Pigs ran about wild, and quite a few chickens were in sight, less wild. Over across the creek showed patches of cultivated ground. And on ahead was a collection of houses beside the stream. Houses! Sure enough, there was no mistake. He came close, staring at them. Native houses thatched with nipa.

He hurried to them, calling. No answer came. He looked into one after another; all were empty and deserted, empty of people, empty of effects. Yet they had not been very long abandoned, by the looks. The taro and yam patches were clear of grass or weeds; a pile of *camotes,* the island yams, lay freshly dug.

Larsen almost forgot his providential escape in the contemplation of this mystery. No people anywhere, yet no sign of death or disease. No boats except the one busted craft. The natives had not dropped everything and fled upon his arrival; there was not so much as a sleeping mat in the houses.

"Be damned if I can savvy it!" He came into the open, peering at the trees, at the creek, and lit another smoke. The sound of his own voice was good to hear. "Where's everybody? Why have they skipped out? Tell me that, will you?"

He jumped. There was a cackle of human laughter.

"They were scared of old Gunner Gunn, that's why!" came the words.

Larsen swung around. Nothing in sight, no one anywhere.

"Hey, there!" he called. "Where are you? Come on, show yourself! I'm a friend! Are you English or American? Come on out of hiding! I won't hurt you! Amigos!"

Another faint cackling laugh responded and then was stilled. Larsen called, threatened, cajoled, and the only response was silence.

Dazedly, he made his way back to the beach where he had landed. Somebody was assuredly hanging around; it was a human voice that had answered his query, and it had spoken good English. Mystery, sure enough!

However, sunset was approaching, and being a very practical young man, Larsen resolved to let the mystery take care of itself for the moment. He wanted a dip in the lagoon, and he was hungry. So he stripped and had a plunge, then attacked his cache of rations. He had food and water and shelter, and the rest could wait till morning. His cigarettes were drying, and he stretched out comfortably in the warm sand as the stars began to dot the greenish sky.

He lay awake a long while. Where this island was, he had no idea. Tomorrow, he reflected, he would explore the place. It was a small island; he would have no difficulty in running down that voice of mystery. It did not come from an enemy, or he would have been attacked before this. Might have been a parrot or a mynah bird, of course; but the voice had been very human.

LULLED by the surf-vibrations from the reefs, he drifted off to sleep before he knew it.

Warm sunlight wakened him; he was on the eastern side of the islet, obviously. He rose, stretched luxuriously, rid of the baggy flying suit, and went down to the creek to douse his head. He came back and attacked his rations anew—it was a K-ration he had opened and there were two others in their waxed containers.

He was eating away heartily when he became vaguely aware of something wrong. At first he could not place what it was; then he woke up. The rubber boat was gone! Yet he had pulled it up far above high water mark.

"Damn!" he said, and went to investigate, without result. The dry sand was scuffed up; the tide was low, and there were no footprints in the wet sand. "Damn!" he repeated, and stood looking around angrily. He lifted his voice.

"Whoever you are, bring that boat back or you'll pay for it! Hear me?"

Only the surf answered him. This was silly business, he thought, addressing the blank trees. Well, he would soon attend to the blighter! He went back and finished his meal, rather soberly. Whoever had taken the boat, could have killed him in his sleep had it been an enemy; this obvious reflection was distinctly annoying. He had no weapon of any kind except a pocket-knife and a razor, part of the toilet kit in the boat.

He palmed his long, lean features, took the razor and went to the creek. There he made shift to get a shave, of sorts; might have been better, but he was in a hurry. He wanted to settle this disturbing business without delay. He looked out at the lagoon where the wrecked bomber lay hidden, and for almost the first time it occurred to him that he was alive where he might well have been dead.

With a somewhat stealthy glance around, Larsen came down on one knee and repeated the Lord's Prayer, the only one he could bring to mind.

". . . world without end, Amen. And thanks, God," he concluded, then rose. It made him feel better, somehow, though he was not much for religion. And now, hiding his stuff away once more, he started for the deserted village. There were paths everywhere.

II

THE island consisted of nothing more than the two little rocky peaks, with the creek and depression between them, where stood the village. The stream came from springs in the north peak, as Larsen later discovered. Here in the valley, where there were no clearings the vegetation was superthick, but was cut up by trails, evidently lately used.

Larsen picked a trail at random, careless whether it led to the western shore of the island or elsewhere. It proved to pierce the jungle in the direction of the south peak, lower than the other and very close to the village. Indeed, before half an hour he found himself clear of brush and on the rocky hummock itself. Also, the trail was deeply worn and must lead somewhere, he reflected.

He was halfway up when he came to a halt, gazing out over the southward sea that glittered in the new sunlight. All empty, but he remembered the blue loom of land to the westward. He could get a sight of it from the crest of the peak—

"Ho. You're on the right track!" cackled a voice. The same voice he had heard the previous evening. He jumped, swung around, saw nothing.

"Who the devil are you? Come out and show yourself!" he called.

"You'll see me soon enough, lad," came the reply. "Who am I? Weston Gunn himself. Gimlet Eye they called me, because I could lay a gun better than the best of 'em; a damned fine gunner, too. There's not much of me left to prove it, but I was broad in the beam and thick in the tail, with a big foot and a strong hand and an eye for the wenches. You wouldn't think it to look at me now."

The voice was real. Larsen tried to follow it, but could see nothing of the speaker. He examined the hummock of rock closely. It was pitted with holes—caves, by looks of them.

He could make no particular sense of the words, but it did not occur to him to feel any fear.

"Are you the guy that stole my rubber boat?" he demanded.

"Aye, that was old Gimlet Eye himself," responded another cackle of mirth. "Go make a song for Gunner Gunn, his day is o'er, his race is run! Zanzibar was my fishing grounds, lad, but I came to Makassar and looted the pearls. That was just two hundred years ago, and here I be today, sitting, looking out to sea for the ship that comes no more—me in my fine scarlet coat wi' the gold braid. All tarnished it is now."

Two hundred years ago—what the hell!

"What kind of a joke are you trying to get off?" demanded Larsen hotly. "Come into the open, you damned fool! I won't hurt you!"

"You'd better not, my lad," was the response. "Keep following your nose and it'll

bring you to me. Poor Jim North, he was the bosun's mate, he was put in the cave with me, but he ain't there now. I couldn't find him. King Kaiwas was king of Tiger Island in those days; a Malay, and paid with diamonds, and I was at sea for him. Many a Jap I killed then, and many another will I kill before long, so watch out sharp."

"Where's everybody?" sang out Larsen. "What's become of the natives here?"

"Scared of me. I scared 'em off. There were some Japs here, but I killed 'em. You will find their bones at the west landing, behind the old ship's ribs. Ho! It takes old Gimlet Eye to kill Japs! I wish I had the guns out of your ship that's under the lagoon—I'd show you how to use 'em!"

"Be damned to you. I'm a gunner myself," said Larson, then checked his words with a silly sense of futility. A laugh responded and died away. Nothing else came; Gunner Gunn had departed, apparently.

Now, at the moment all this wild talk—for it seemed wild—sounded like the ravings of a maniac to Larsen, and small blame to him.

He stood reflectively. Here, he thought, must be some poor devil of a lunatic who imagined himself in the guise of an ancient freebooter or pirate seaman—and talked like it to boot. This was the obvious conclusion, yet in some ways it hardly made good sense at that. The natives, for instance, would have known him for a lunatic and would not have deserted their island home because of his ravings. Apparently the fellow was harmless enough and meant no deviltry.

Weston Gunn—old Gimlet Eye—Gunner Gunn! A funny business, certainly.

Larsen went on. The path was easy to negotiate, and curved upward, around the rise of the peak. It brought him at length to the west side of the hummock, which here fell down in long rocky descents to brush and trees and the west shore of the islet. But it was not at the shore that he stood gazing.

Westward lay the land he had seen, from aloft, long and high and blue; about twenty miles away, he figured roughly. And something else—the triangular sail of a native boat, apparently heading for this island. He gazed at it, wishing he had binoculars. It was no more than three or four miles away, apparently, and seemed headed straight in.

He almost turned back there; it was in his mind to go down to the valley and seek the west side of the island. If that boat held natives, they would take him off. Good! However, he determined to go ahead and reach the summit, or wherever the path might lead, for it certainly went somewhere. If that boat did not take him off, he reflected, he might fetch some brush and wood up the peak and prepare a beacon as a signal. No rush about getting down. The wind was light and that boat would not be in for a long while—if it were coming in. It might only be on a tack.

So he went ahead.

He did not have far to go. Short of the summit, the path swerved and brought him to a level expanse, a shelf backed by the tip of the peak; there were more pitted caves here. And there was something else. Something that fetched him to a halt and held him bug-eyed, incredulous, the flesh prickling up his spine.

For here, seated on a pile of rock against the cliff, the wind streaming out his fluttering garments, sat Gimlet Eye himself. He knew instantly why those natives had been scared off the islands. He was scared stiff himself, for a moment.

The Thing sat there, one boot cocked up atop a rounded, rusty old sea-chest, pistol in one hand, cutlass in the other. A Thing draped in tattered garments, long gray beard framing the white glint of teeth, blue eyes staring at the sky from a skeleton face. It was monstrous, inhuman, shocking. The way those wrists and hands hung down, clutching the weapons, the way those eyes peered out at heaven and sea, appalled him. He could fancy a wreath of smoke curling up from the pistol.

Larsen hung on to himself; he was not easily shaken, but there was something outside of all his experience. Terrible thoughts shook him. Was it possible that he had heard a ghostly voice, and not a living man? Had the ghost of Gunner Gunn been speaking to him?

"Maybe I'm going nuts," he said, anxious for the sound of his own voice.

Was the Thing real? It was! horrible real, yet he doubted his own senses, quite pardonably. He spoke again, to convince himself he was awake.

"Hey, you! Are you Gunner Gunn? If you are, speak up!"

He almost took an answer for granted, after that talk with nothing down the trail, but none came. The Thing peered up at the empty skies, unmoving, unspeaking.

"Of course it won't speak. It's dead," said Larsen. "Been dead two hundred years, too—if that blasted voice told the truth."

He moved closer, close enough to touch the Thing. It was real and it was dead, plenty dead. It was a combination of skeleton and mummy. Larsen had the answer from the holes in the rock behind—a squeaking and rustling. He knew what that meant; bats. Those caves in the cliff were filled with bats.

Now the Thing began to make sense to him. Somebody, whether old Gimlet Eye in the flesh or not, had been laid to rest in one of those caves a long time ago. To judge from the size and contour of that pistol, it had been plenty long ago. Had the corpse moved out here of itself? Not likely.

He came close, touched the mummified hands, and examined critically. A skeleton does not hang together by itself, nor does a mummified corpse hold on to the weapons by itself. Looking carefully, he found what he sought. Bits of wire held the weapons in those dead and awful hands. And the blue eyes in the eye-sockets of the skull—ha! Bits of bright blue glass fixed in place, with a damned glitter shining through them!

Larsen stepped back and fumbled for a cigarette, with a surge of untold relief.

"Well, I'll be damned! This is something, sure enough!" he said, addressing the silent shape. "What's in that chest—anything? You poor old skinny coot, you sure look like hell, and I mean hell, too! Somebody sure did a work of art when they put you together and stacked you out here; but who did it?"

No reply. The ghost had ceased to speak, or was elsewhere.

Ghost? Larsen shook his head. He took no stock in the supernatural—but he did have a slightly creepy feeling at the remembrance of the voice, and what it had said. Weston Gunn himself speaking? Maybe, maybe not. It had told him what he would find here though, and it had done him no harm—but it had stolen the rubber boat. And spirits do not monkey with material things. So that ruled out spirits.

Larsen got a smoke alight and squinted at Gunner Gunn critically.

"Somebody wired you up and put you here and scared hell out of the natives—that much is clear enough," he ruminated. "But the voice that spoke to me! Either somebody was kidding me or a lunatic is running around loose, or else it was your ghost. And I'm betting it was no ghost."

He eyed the holes in the rock with no ambition whatever to explore them. Stuck away in those caves, probably high and dry inside at all weathers, a corpse might very well mummify. He went close to the figure and eyed the chest curiously. A glint of greenish corroded brass caught his eye at one end. Initials could be descried, outlined with brass nails or tacks—W. G. Weston Gunn? Maybe. And the tattered garments, falling to pieces, that hung on the corpse—it did look like a scarlet coat, sure enough. Larsen gazed at the faceless skull and shivered, then reality asserted itself and he laughed.

The mystery was dispelled, in large part. Somebody had found this mummy lying in a cave and had fixed it up like this; with it had been documents, probably, giving the story about Gimlet Eye Gunn. The same Somebody had apparently picked up enough from them to imagine himself Mr. Gunn—since it was not very likely that he would be playing a joke. It was all more like the work of a lunatic. Only . . .

"Only, somehow, what the voice said sounded real as hell," thought Larsen a trifle uncomfortably. "And be damned if the eyes in that skull don't look to be alive! I don't like it, any of it, but I'm not falling for any ghost stuff, and I'm not falling for old whiskers yonder either! So long, mister, and be good."

He started away, recollecting that boat he had seen and making for the point on the

trail that would open out the western view. If that boat were really coming to the island, he wanted to be down at the shore when it came.

Oh, boy! It was coming in, sure enough —not more than a couple of miles out now, he figured, and pointing steadily in. He could see dots of figures aboard, and even a flutter of white in the stern.

"Mrs. Gunn, maybe" he thought, striding down the trail, and a laugh came to his lips. "What did that screwball say about the bones of Japs at the western beach? Back of a ship's ribs. Huh! We'll see about that."

His pace quickened. To be honest about it, he was just as glad to get away from old Gimlet Eye Gunn and his rusted chest and his pistol, with that foot cocked up on the chest as large as life—ugh!

III

TWICE, on his way down to the creek below, Larsen addressed the empty air loudly, expecting to hear the cackling laugh and the husky voice of Mr. Gunn, but only silence made response.

He hurried, though not from fear. The morning was splendidly warm and brilliant; when he got down to the windless little valley and the creek, he was sweating. He turned westward by a heavily worn trail, and the creek lessened, then disappeared.

To the western shore could not have been more than a mile, but so thick was the vegetation of tree and shrub that not even a sight of the sea was visible. The trail continued hard-beaten and wide, as though much used, but there was no further indication of any habitation. Of the little north peak he could see only that bare rock stuck up above the trees, but it was steeper than the other and its base seemed to form the north side of the island. Nothing much here except the one tiny valley and its village.

Suddenly the vegetation thinned to thorny pandanus scrub and he stood looking down at the beach and the sea beyond. The beach was white coral sand like the eastern one and made a curving cove, a few hundred feet wide. The water was thirty feet from him, and there, sure enough, was coming the boat!

Larsen goggled at it excitedly. A quarter-mile out, it was obviously headed for the cove and beach; he stood motionless, not daring to come out into the open as yet, lest he frighten the craft off. In the prow, the figures of natives were visible, brown men wearing bright-hued sarongs, Malays or Dyaks; the patch of white in the stern was not visible now. Probably a big fishing craft, he thought, and wondered if any of them would savvy English.

Then, closer at hand, he saw something else that jerked at him.

Out of the white sand, buried to the eyes, protruded the skeleton bow and ribs of a small ship. It was pointing seaward, so that he could look slap into what had been the slanting fore deck and was now drifted sand. "Behind the old ship's ribs" had said that ghostly voice. And sure enough, there they were—at least, he could see a pile of bones and several skulls heaped in the very bows, sand over and around them. Japs? Dead Japs piled there to decay in the sunlight? Hard to say. They were human bones, at any rate. What gave Larsen a queer turn was this corroboration of what the Voice had said to him.

"Next thing you know, I'll be dreaming about that screwball," muttered Larsen with a growl.

The boat was coming in fast; he turned to it in relief. This was real and tangible at all events. He heard the voices of the Malays as they brought down the sail and put out sweeps. He could see their flat, dish-like faces and their black teeth. They looked over their shoulders at the island, as though in fear. Ha! Perhaps they were some of the natives who had been scared off! Larsen stood motionless.

Then, close inshore, the boat began to turn. There was no surf here; it was no doubt broken by reefs far out. He watched, in swift alarm; turning around? No. Only to back in, stern first. This was odd, certainly. . . .

His thoughts died away. His jaw fell. A white-clad figure stood up in the stern as it

came in upon the sand—a white woman, by the Lord! He saw her jump out, and saw bundles tossed after her. She caught them, laughing, and he heard her voice say something to the brown men in their own tongue.

Then, abruptly he came alive. Two of the Malays were at the sail, hoisting it. Two others stood up, handling their oars like poles to push off. They were going back—they were leaving! With a sudden wild yell, Larsen leaped out of the brush and went across the sand at a plunging run.

"Hold on! Hold on!" he shouted.

A yell arose from the brown men—fear unmistakable. The sail jerked up, the oars were put out again, and the rowers dug in. The boat leaped away from the shore, and went like mad. Larsen, shouting and swearing in mingled fury and dismay, came to a halt at the beach, regardless of the woman in white. The more he shouted and shook his fist, the faster went the boat, slanting over to the wind, speeding out like a skimming bird.

"No use," said the woman. "They're too scared of the place already to wait. I had to bribe them heavily to land here."

LARSEN swung around to her, almost with a groan. It was checked at once. He saw a young woman, smiling: a healthily tanned, undeniably pleasant-looking young woman, wearing the tattered and much mended and patched remains of a nurse's uniform. Surprise came into her face as she met his gaze.

"Hello!" she exclaimed. "You're not Dr. Bowe!"

"Eh? Hell, no," said Larsen. "He's on the phone in the other office. Say, what does all this mean? Am I clear off my nut?"

"Apparently you are," she replied calmly, watching him. "You certainly give every indication of it."

"Ouch!" he said, and drew a long breath. The boat was gone, far gone. Yet he could only stare helplessly at the young woman. "Say, are you an American girl?"

"My mother always told me so, and I believed her," said she, and cut loose with a twinkling smile. They looked at each other for a moment; under her twinkle, Larsen lost his sulky amazement and broke into a laugh. He was good to see when he laughed, for his features, usually too serious, rippled into mirth and strength and quick appeal.

"Sorry, sister," he said, and extended his hand. "My name's Pete Larsen. Air Force gunner. You'll have to excuse my symptoms, because I don't know where I am and seeing you was certainly a jolt. Our bomber went down on the other side of the island and I got ashore, and that may explain a lot of things."

"Well, it explains you anyhow," she said frankly, and shook hands. "I'm Susan Mason, originally of Des Moines, Iowa, and more lately from the mission hospital at Cuyacan, and the concentration camp over yonder at Baguio Island—that's the blue mass overlooking the horizon. Now can we get out of the sun and talk comfortably? I don't suppose you're alone here?"

"Yep. Except for Gimlet Eye Gunn—and I don't know yet whether he's a ghost or a skeleton or a mental case worse off than I am," rejoined Larsen. "Let's have your luggage and we'll hunt the shade yonder."

"Be careful," she said, as he stooped to gather up the bundles. "Those are grub and clothes and personal possessions, all I have in the world."

"I'm not that hungry," he said, and led the way toward the sand-gulfed ship, whose high prow cast a triangle of shade across the sand.

Here they settled themselves comfortably. Larsen produced cigarettes and at her quick exclamation of delight passed her one and held a light.

"I'll lead off, Susie, unless you want to start first."

"No, go ahead. There's so much I don't know! Until lately, I've been a prisoner ever since the war started."

"You poor kid! All right, then—"

He told how he had come here, and sketched the background of events that had brought him here. She listened intently, dragging at the cigarette in avid enjoyment. Only native tobacco and little of that, said she, for a long while. When he had finished, with no mention as yet of Gunner Gunn, she nodded.

"I begin to get it, Pete," she said, with a sigh. "We've heard rumors, of course, and once or twice have seen planes, that's all. Well, everybody in these parts was concentrated over there on Baguio Island—that means Windy Island. It's northeast of Zamboanga, and a long way from Leyte. Last month we had a chance to get away and some of us took it. We've been hiding out with the natives in the mountains, ever since.

"Then I heard that Dr. Bowe had come over here; this is called Tiger Island. Why, what's the matter?" she exclaimed at his startled word. He waved his hand.

"Never mind. Tell you later. No tiger's been seen around here, thank heaven!"

"Oh, it's an old name, I suppose. Well, things were pretty tough for us and I thought I'd come here and find Dr. Bowe. He was our head surgeon and a splendid man. The natives said nobody lived here any more because devils had driven them out, and after a lot of talk they agreed to bring me, and here I am."

Larsen looked at her. "What you want to find this doctor for? You folks in love?"

A gasp and a laugh escaped her. "Heavens, no! He has a family back home. You're a terribly direct sort of person, aren't you?"

"I dunno," replied Larsen. "I was never much good at beating around the bush. I wouldn't blame him at that. You're a knockout."

Her lips twitched. "Thanks, Pete. I need to find him because I've got a bad appendix and it must come out, and nobody else could do it. I pretty near passed out a couple of weeks ago, and another attack may finish me if the appendix bursts. Any more secrets you'd like to know?"

LARSEN considered her reflectively and nodded.

"Yeah, several; but let 'em pass. I was curious, that's all. Didn't mean any harm, Susie. Well, I have bad news for you. Your doc isn't here. The place is deserted—and not deserted enough."

"What was it you said about a ghost?"

"Well, suppose we let that wait a bit. I'd like to see what happens; if you hear what I hear and so forth. I'm not sure if I've been having delusions or what."

"You seem remarkably sane to me, all kidding aside," she observed.

He grinned. "Hope it's true. Any chance of your natives coming back with the boat?"

"No, I'm sorry to say. You saw how they skipped out."

"Okay. Then let's go and I'll show you around my domain. I'm not sure who's king of Tiger Island, me or Gimlet Eye; but I haven't seen a living soul since I got here, so you're safe from Japs, anyhow. Want to be moving?"

She nodded. They rose, and Larsen picked up the bundles, refusing to let her help. He took occasion to fling a glance in through the gaunt ribs of the wreck, and saw the bones and skulls, several of the latter. He grunted and said nothing, but led the way to the path that traversed the little valley.

"Some good-looking native shacks over ahead," he said. "And plenty of grub in sight—pigs and chickens and yams and so forth. I expect there are fish, too. I've got hooks and line that came with the rubber boat."

"Oh! You have a rubber boat?"

"Well, I had. It vanished on me the first night—hell! That was only last night. Seems like I've been here a week," he admitted awkwardly. "I got here yesterday morning and slept until late in the afternoon; mixed me up a bit."

She laughed, and he struck out ahead of her to avoid further questions.

In due time the trail picked up the creek and the dozen or more houses of the village came into sight. These they examined minutely, and finally picked on two small ones, side by side, for occupancy. Susan Mason stored her bundles in one.

"What stuff I've got is hidden down by the shore," said Larsen. "Come on and we'll get it, and I'll show you the lagoon where my ship went down. Say, I'm tickled pink to have you here, Susie! Anything human would be a relief."

"Back-handed but still a compliment," said she cheerfully. "It's sure plenty warm under these trees, Pete! I could do with a

dip in the creek, too, or a swim if the shore waters are safe from sharks. This is like being clear out of the whole world!"

He gave her a look. "If I were you I wouldn't count on too much privacy around here, Susie gal. Maybe looks are deceptive."

"Why, what do you mean?"

He paid no heed to the question, but led the way toward the beach. The stretch of white sand came in sight, and then he halted abruptly.

"That's what I mean," he said, as he caught the cackling laugh of Mr. Gunn.

IV

"HO-HO-HO! You have a good eye for a wench, lad, same as old Gimlet Eye!" rang out the voice.

Larsen turned and met her eyes. "Do you hear it?"

"Why, yes, of course!"

"Oh! That's fine." He drew a long breath of relief, and looked around. Nothing in sight. He raised his voice. "Hello there, Gimlet Eye! Come out and meet the lady."

"Hell's bells and a sack o' barley!" came instant response. "I was never a rogue for the ladies. Give old Gunner Gunn a wench who can kiss a tankard and wipe out a gun with a wet mop. None of your fine mincing ladies. Be damned to them all—"

A stormy lusty volley of oaths resounded. Susan Mason eyed Larsen critically then stared around.

"You're not a ventriloquist, by any chance?" she inquired. "No, I see it's not you. Who is it?"

"Ask me something easy," said Larsen. "Hey, Gimlet Eye! I saw your hunk of bones up on on the hill. What's in the chest?"

"Look and see, you blasted rogue," came the reply, apparently from the trees. "I'm going fishing for a gun from your ship one of these nights. I ever fancied a Long Tom and had a neat one I got out of a Bristol ship, but she was a hard old girl to fire. I've been talking with one of your crew, a bloody fine chap named Dierschow, and he's showing me how to work your guns. Take your wench up the hill and show her my bones, but mind you don't touch 'em or I'll haunt you."

Larsen gulped and felt prickles run up his spine. Dierschow! Walter Dierschow had been bombardier and navigator of the ship—how in the devil's name could this voice know it? He looked at Susan.

"Did you hear that? Dierschow?"

"Of course, I did," she said. "Why shouldn't I?"

"Damn it, I don't know—Walter Dierschow was our navigator." Sweat started from his cheeks, he stared around desperately. "I don't know what to make of this—ghosts don't talk or fire guns."

"Ease off, soldier," she said quietly. "Don't let it get your nerves. There'll be a very ordinary explanation, be sure of that."

"Yes, you talk like a blasted hospital nurse," he broke out. "How can there be any explanation of his knowing that name?"

The cackle of Mr. Gunn's laughter sounded, then thinned away and died. Evidently Gimlet Eye found Larsen's bewilderment very amusing.

"I'm sorry, Susie," said Larsen after a minute. "It gave me a bad turn, for a fact. See here, suppose we go up the hill and I'll show you old Gunn, and you'll savvy the whole thing—as far as I do, anyhow."

"Good idea. I'll let the swim wait," said she. "Then we'll come back down and start housekeeping, eh?"

"Okay. Say!" he exclaimed suddenly. "That voice—was that your Doctor Bowe?"

"It certainly was not," she replied. "He has a low, soft, gentle voice, and he never did any cursing and swearing. But see here—do you mean to tell me this was just a voice? Why, that's impossible, Pete!"

"That's what I thought," he rejoined. "And he stole my rubber boat, too. Ghosts don't do things like that. If it wasn't a ghost and wasn't a delusion, then what was it?"

"A man, of course," she said with a sniff.

"All right. Come along and I'll show you the man, old Gunn himself."

HE LED the way, found the path going up the hill, and kept going in advance. They reached the shelf at last where

Gimlet Eye sat in all his glory, and Susan examined him absorbedly, while Larsen examined her with equal attention. She was certainly worth it, he decided; he liked her bright, cheery way and her lithe suppleness, and in fact everything about her. She wore native sandals, probably for lack of shoes, and the old mended nurse's uniform was a shapeless bag—that is, if anything could be shapeless when draped on her.

"I might swap clothes with Mr. Gunn," said she. "We're both scarecrows. What's in that chest?"

"Search me. I was wondering myself." Larsen came to life. "You hold up his foot and I'll move the chest out."

She complied. The old and rusted chest slid out and Larsen managed to pry up the curved top lid. There was nothing inside. He closed it again and shoved it back under the booted, skeleton foot.

"Look here!" Susan was unashamedly examining Mr. Gunn's anatomy. "Part of him is mummy, part skeleton. And the bones have been wired together. Expertly. I'll bet a doctor did it. Probably Dr. Bowe."

"You'd better not carry your post-mortem too far," warned Larsen. "You heard what he said. He'll sure as hell haunt you, Susie."

She gave over her examination and joined him, sitting on a bit of rock and looking at the cliffs. He explained his theory about the cave, and she nodded, an attractive little frown wrinkling her forehead.

"Why is it," said Larsen, "that wrinkles look like the deuce on an old woman, and make a young one look mighty pleasant?"

"They lend a bit of dignity." Laughing, she turned to him. "You can't figure out any answer to this thing—the voice and all?"

"Nope. Can you?"

"Not a trace of one. I like those blue eyes of his, don't you? They seem lifelike. And this is a grand place for a lookout!"

She sat gazing over the farflung waters, until she became aware of Larsen's fixed regard, and stood up.

"Want to go? If we—oh!"

She swung around, startled, at a clanging crash from behind her. The cutlass had escaped from the fingers of Mr. Gunn and clashed against the iron chest. Larsen went to it and picked it up. Rusty as it was, it would still cut after a fashion.

"Can you cook a chicken, Susie?"

"Try me and see."

"That's a bet. Chicken and yams! Sounds good. We'll use this to operate on the chicken. You haven't got a gun, by any chance?"

"Not likely. Haven't you?"

"Nope. Got nothing. All right, let's go. And after we eat, I'll get a hen fixed up properly and we'll start housekeeping this evening on your cooking. Say! No beds either. We'll have to fix up something. Do you want Gunn's rags to serve as blankets?"

She threw a glance at the ancient shape and shivered slightly.

"I do not."

"We're agreed on that point, anyhow. So long, Gimlet Eye! See you later."

There was no response; evidently the voice was not here.

UPON regaining the lower ground, Susan provided lunch from her own bundles, for her native edibles would not keep and rations would. Over the smoke that followed, she expressed her intention of having a swim in the lagoon.

"You go find a chicken and pluck and dress it, and stay up in the village," she said. Larsen cocked an eye at her.

"What if the ghost sees you?"

"Ghosts don't worry me. Other people do."

"All right. A shark may get you if you don't have anybody watching out to save your life. Or an octopus."

"I'll chance that." Her eyes twinkled. They were nice eyes, brown ones; her hair was brown, too, and braided about her head. "Is it a bargain?"

"All right," he said. "I'll be glad to see it happen, too."

"See what happen?"

"See Gimlet Eye come to life. He will, you bet. He has an eye for a wench, Susie."

Susan eyed him, a trace of red creeping up her cheeks.

"I'm not joking. And you'd better not, either. This is a serious matter."

"That's true enough. Old Gimlet Eye

has been sitting up on that hill for two hundred years or so, and if he comes down to join you at your diversions you can bet it will be serious—"

Larsen grabbed the cutlass and took to his heels, just in time to evade a chunk of coral that whizzed past his ear. He made for the village and stayed there.

Being a Brooklyn lad by training, he had never in his life had any dealings with chickens on the hoof. These creatures were by no means wild, but evidently guessed his intentions, and stopped at nothing to balk him. At length he ran down an indignant hen and by virtue of falling on her and grabbing with both hands, captured her, or thought he had done so; but Malay chickens, regardless of sex, are fighters.

"Damn you, I'd like to wring your neck!" he grunted, but did not know how so he went after the old cutlass. Instead of cutting off her head, he cut off her body and it flopped at him, gunner or no gunner, he ran. After a while he came back to the corpse and plucked it cold, more or less. He vaguely remembered something about singeing a chicken but had no fire, so pursued his task to the bitter end, after which he got out his pocketknife and went to work on the innards, largely a matter of by guess and by gosh.

He was still at this, amid a mass of feathers and blood, when Susan came upon the scene and with a burst of laughter relieved him of the mess. She was flushed and rosy and said she had enjoyed a swell dip and there was no sign of Gimlet Eye.

"You probably scared him into modest blushes," said Larsen, and went off to dig some yams. There were some already dug, which saved trouble. They had begun to mould but he scraped off the green film and washed them in the creek, as good as ever. Then firewood. Then he retrieved all his buried belongings and took them up to his own house, and with no further demands on his time, went for a swim himself.

He did not swim long because he could not get the thought of his buried ship and shipmates down below out of his head. He was worried over that voice and the mention of Dierschow, too, he came back and dressed in the warm sun and cursed Gunner Gunn with hearty emphasis. The cackling snicker answered him.

"In my day a seafaring man could use stronger language than that, my lad," said the voice. Larsen looked around.

"You go to hell, will you?" he requested impolitely of the trees.

"I've been there already and don't like it. That's why I'm back here," responded the voice. "A good tall tankard of rum, that's what you need. King Kaiwas used to make stiff palm wine for me, and it was good. No palms on the island now. There was no chicken blood on that cutlass of mine, either, when I had it. Coming up from Makassar, last voyage, we ran into a Dutch barque and boarded her, and the blade ran red from point to hilt; and now you defile it with chicken blood!"

"Come out and show yourself, will you?" snapped Larsen. He heard a cackling in the brush, and went for it on the jump, regardless of thorns, only to see a pig go bouncing away, and to hear the cackling mirth of the unseen Mr. Gunn, whom he damned heartily.

Anyhow, the chicken and yams were first-rate that evening, one spitted over a fire and the others baked in the ashes. Susan certainly could cook.

V

DURING the three following days nothing untoward happened and Gunner Gunn remained silent.

The two castaways did not do so badly. They reposed on beds of giant ferns and long grass which Larsen gathered, and under the influence of Susan Mason he quite recovered his usual good spirits; with every day his admiration of her increased. She knew a hundred deft ways of doing things, native fashion, that made life more agreeable.

Larsen lugged loads of firewood up to the shelf where Mr. Gunn reposed and made ready a beacon, against the unlikely event of a ship or planes showing up. He got out his fishing tackle that had been placed in the rubber boat; he could see

plenty of fish close to hand but for lack of any craft was unable to catch them, whereat he damned old Gimlet Eye afresh. A few hundred yards down the beach, at the north side, was a jumbled mass of coral lumps, and a bit of reef which was bared at low tide, but a visit showed nothing of interest there, and he confined his explorations to the west beach and the two hills. That on the north provided nothing of appeal except a large spring that fed the creek, and was too steep to climb easily, so he desisted.

On the third evening they finished the rations and bundled provisions, and Susan suggested that he butcher a pig.

"I don't like pork that much," said Larsen. "I'm not tired of yams, yet. And there are fish, if we could get 'em. Don't desert islanders always catch oysters and such?"

SHE shook her head. "Not according to the natives. The shellfish aren't recommended except for would-be suicides. Are you one?"

"Not while you're on hand, anyhow."

"Well, you'd better chase up something to cook tomorrow," she rejoined tartily.

A laugh came out of the shadows. "You'll have plenty to cook. Your rubber boat will be back. But keep away from the point of rocks, understand?" When he said this, Gimlet Eye sounded serious. "Keep well away from them, or I'll take your boat and never give it back again."

"Won't you come and join us, Mr. Gunn?" spoke up Susan. "We'd love to have you."

"Aye, lass, there's many a wench has bade me welcome," replied the voice. "But thanks for the invitation. I'll bide where I am, since two's company. Just for your kind word, I'll make you a gift of what I stole from King Kaiwas."

Susan looked around, unavailingly. "That is very kind of you."

"Aye, you're a polite sort of wench, damme if you ain't!" said he. "Very well, I make you a present of my old pistol, but look out you don't try to fire it without drawing the load and using a fresh flint. The mate to it exploded and killed poor

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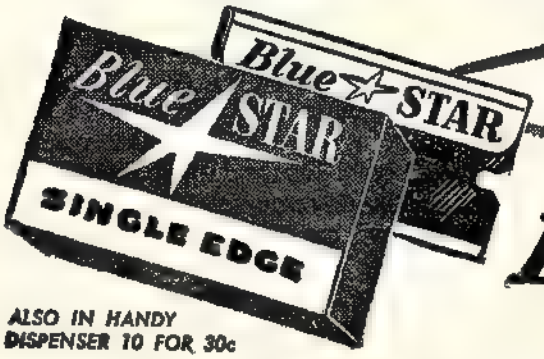

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Bosum Jem, it did, on account of him being careless that way."

"Thank you, I'll remember it," said she.

"And when those damned Japs come around, you'll be glad of old Gimlet Eye, lass. He'll handle 'em! He can lay a gun better than any man alive."

WITH this, Mr. Gunn apparently departed to his own place, wherever that was. In a cave, probably, said Larsen with a grunt of scorn. Ghosts and bats seemed to get on well together.

"This thing is getting on my nerves, Susie," he went gloomily. "Darned if I'll believe in ghosts and they that steal boats! But what's the answer, except just that?"

"I don't know, but I'm sure there'll be one," she replied. "And it'll probably turn out to be something very simple and logical; it always does. It's easy to imagine things, and they always prove to be matter of fact in the end. What worries me is what's become of Dr. Bowe. The natives said that he arrived here all right, then vanished one day."

"Everything about this place is cockeyed," he growled. "That is, all but you. If it wasn't for you, I'd have gone off my nut."

"I don't think so, Pete. You're pretty well balanced. Suppose we just wait and see what the morning brings forth. Maybe the boat will be returned, like his promise said would happen. And remember, a real voice doesn't come from nowhere. It comes from a real mouth."

"All right. Mr. Gunn is real. So what? We know he's roosting up on the peak, and does he come down here to talk to us?"

She shook her head. "Not likely. I've never yet seen corpses walking and talking."

"Is there anything more unlikely than the assumption that someone is playing a joke on us? That doesn't make sense."

"No. I'm not saying it makes sense—but I'm sure the explanation will. We'd better be thankful we're not worse off and let it go at that. If these nights were cold, we'd be suffering. Were you in my house today?"

"Me?" he demanded in surprise. "Of course not. Why?"

"Somebody was. My things were rummaged over; nothing missing, but not the way I left them. What do you make of that?"

"Gimlet Eye, damn him! Or else a pig got in and nosed around."

"Maybe. Well, I'm going to curl up in my ferns like a squirrel."

"Squirrels don't curl. Goodnight, and if Mr. Gunn drops in, holler!"

She was strictly okay, thought Larsen, looking after her with a warm glow of liking. Not many gals would take all this funny business the way she took it. Level headed, too; this showed in the way she had come over here to find Dr. Bowe after diagnosing her own trouble.

Larsen crawled into his own hut and burrowed down amid the ferns and slept.

Her voice awakened him to sunlight and breakfast—a spot of coffee each. There had been some powdered coffee in the supplies packed with the boat; it would not last them long, but it was a life-saver. Larsen crawled out, went to the creek, doused his head, and joined her by the fire.

"WHY so early and cheerful?" he demanded.

"Oh, I was curious! I went down to the beach. And, Pete! Your rubber boat is back. Just as he said it would be! At least, I think that's what's floating out a little way from shore. No hurry about it," she added, as Larsen moved to jump up. "The tide's nearly at flood and the boat won't get far."

"Why on earth do you suppose he took it?"

She broke into merry laughter. "Oh, he was probably floating around with your friend Dierchow, trying to get a gun off the wreck of your plane!" She checked her bantering tone at sight of his quick wince. "I'm sorry, Pete!" Leaning over, she patted his hand in swift remorse. "I didn't stop to think; forgive me."

Larsen's grin flashed out at her.

"Forget it, Susie. I'm tickled that you're feeling so good. I'll grab my coffee and beat it. You keep clear of the lagoon for a while, will you?"

She nodded, an impish look in her eyes. "Sure! You can have it all to yourself. I'm going over to the west beach and have a dip. But mind you don't go floating around and fishing without your clothes! I don't want a sunburned patient on my hands! And if you get any fish, you clean them before you fetch 'em home."

"Okay. I'll take that roast yam we had left over last night for bait, till I get a piece of fish to use. So long!"

He departed in eager excitement and ran to the beach. Sure enough, there it was, floating a hundred feet offshore!

With a shout of delight he stripped and took to the water. As he dashed in, he came to a halt, waist-deep, and then looked around. Here, washing in on the flood tide, were odds and ends of debris—bits of paper and splintered wood, and the brown waxed paper from a ration-container. Curious! They must have washed out of the wrecked plane, he thought, and pursued his way.

Five minutes later he was hauling himself into the rubber boat. In it lay one of the paddles, and the whole inside of the doughnut was dripping wet. And, rolling around loosely, he saw a .50 calibre machine-gun cartridge. He flopped in, and lay there warming in the sun and staring at this cartridge.

Where had it come from? Certainly it had not been there when he lost the boat. And who had been using the craft so recently that it was slopping wet? There was only one answer. He remembered, too, what the voice had said—"I'm going fishing for a gun from your ship one of these nights." Had Mr. Gunn really been doing this—did this explain the cartridge and the wet boat and the debris floating inshore?

"That guy will drive me nuts yet," said Larsen resignedly, and sat up, reaching for the paddle.

THE boat had drifted, probably with a current, up to the north end of the lagoon and close to the jumbled pile of coral rocks there. As Larsen sat up, he was facing these rocks—and had a momentary glimpse of something that paralyzed him. It was a face, looking square at him from those rocks; a face with wild staring eyes and long matted beard. Even as he sighted it, the thing was gone. It was there, then it was not there. He blinked, then his panic passed. A slow grin came to his lips, as he recalled the repeated injunction to keep away from those rocks.

"Okay, Gimlet Eye," he sang out. "I'll keep away, but if you do any more prowling around Susie's house you'll get your eyes blacked. Mind it!"

He had no response, and wanted none. A surge of relief and delight went through him as he fell to work. That face, those eyes, had supplied the missing answer. They had to deal with a harmless lunatic of some kind who was wandering about the island, probably living in caves, and fancied himself to be Mr. Gunn.

By the time he reached the shore, Larsen's exultation began to fade. The Explanation did sound plausible and was probably correct more or less; but it did not fit all the facts, nor did it seem likely that another human could be inhabiting the island and still remain unseen and leave no traces.

"Oh, well, anything's possible with a screwball!" reflected Larsen, as he got into his clothes, or part of them. Thus dismissing the whole matter, very happily too, he put his fishing lines and baked yam into the boat and shoved out. Maybe Gimlet Eye had managed to get one of the guns out of the wreck; he seemed nuts about guns, and that cartridge would hint as much. What of it? He was clearly harmless.

Thereafter, for a space, Gunner Larsen of Brooklyn found everything rosy, and when he got the boat over toward the reef the fishing was so good that it astonished him. The first thing he caught was a little octopus as big as his hand; using bits of this for bait, he began to haul in real fish, to his immense delight.

Half an hour later he came ashore, carefully pulled up the boat above high water level, and scooped out a shimmering mess of fish. He stripped a length of vine and strung them on it, then started for camp. A voice—the voice—leaped out at him.

"Ho, shipmate! Ahoy there! You'd best

clap on all sail and sharp about it, for the wench has need of you! Blow me and swivel me if she didn't get caught in a surf-roll and get pounded on the bottom!"

Larsen made no response, but he hurried. At the village there was no sign of Susan; dropping the fish, he pushed on, calling to her. No answer came, nor did Gimlet Eye speak up again.

Coming to the west beach, Larsen saw that a high, heavy surf was rolling in, and sharp alarm tugged at him. The voice might have told the truth at that. He glanced along the shore and saw no sign of her, hurried on across the sand—then sighted something inert and white, half awash and drifting out with the now ebbing tide.

He damned old Gimlet Eye no more.

VI

GETTING that senseless figure to shore was no light task; luckily, she had not drifted out beyond the surf.

The big combers rolled in and broke with terrific bursting force. If she had been caught and pounded on the bottom, as might easily happen to a careless swimmer, there was explanation enough of her plight.

Larsen got her inshore at last, pulled her upon the sand. Her clothes were weighted down under a bit of rock, close by; she wore only a thin garment. Larsen heaped up sand, laid her over it face down, and went to work pressing and expanding her lungs. Her face was bruised, her arms and shoulders cut and scratched—Gimlet Eye had called the turn and no mistake.

After a moment she coughed up sea-water and sneezed lustily.

"God bless you!" said Larsen, and fetched her clothes, and spread them over her, then climbed into his own things. She had not come around, but her heart was beating and he knew she was all right. He knelt, looking down at her face; then suddenly leaned over and touched his lips to hers, and stood up.

"About my only chance, I guess," he observed. "Golly! What a sweet kid you are! You'd better wake up or I'll be tempted to do it over again."

Her arm moved; she flung a hand over her face, and struck the bruise above her eyes, and the pain evidently awakened her, for a groan escaped her and she opened her eyes. With a quick movement, she sat up, staring open-mouthed at Larsen.

"Oh! You—how—what happened?" she exclaimed.

"Don't ask questions. I don't know." Larsen got a cigarette alight and handed it to her. "Gimlet Eye said you needed help, and so you did. I pulled you up and emptied your lungs, and if you'll come along to camp I'll get some first aid dope on those bruises. He said a wave rolled you over."

"He said? Yes, it did. Then he must have been watching me!"

"Nope," said Larsen. "He was over by the lagoon. I saw him. Do you get that? I saw the guy! At least, a face looked out at me, all whiskers and big staring eyes. That settles the mystery, Mr. Gunn is just a loony who believes he's Gimlet Eye, probably made up the whole yarn, like some of these guys who think they're Napoleon."

Clutching her garments to her, Susan stared at him.

"So that's it! But how—"

"Never mind questions, Susie. Hop into your duds and come along."

"Oh! Do you think I'm going to dress in front of you?"

"Okay, behind me then." Larsen rolled over and turned his back. "You don't need to be so durned modest anyhow. Your bathing suit wasn't any overcoat. And I saved your life for you—"

A shower of sand hit him. "So it was you that kissed me! I thought it was a dream and—oh! I could wring your neck, Pete Larsen!"

Larsen made no response; he was clawing sand from the unwrung neck and smothering curses. Then, when she declared herself ready, he came erect to find her eyes twinkling at him and her cheeks dimpling.

"Thanks for saving my life—and everything," she said, breaking into a laugh. Oh, Pete, I do like you a lot! But I'm all scratched up and bumped and sore—I thought sure I was done for when I was rolled around under that surf!"

Larsen grinned, and they were friends.

"Fish fry for lunch," he said. "Oh, boy! Will they taste good!"

"I hope so. Salt might improve them," she observed, as they started along the trail. "And this afternoon I'm going to go up the hill again."

"Want to sleep in a cave with the bats?"

"No, silly. I want to get the pistol Mr. Gunn gave me. I bet he had a reason for it. And he was the cause of saving my life, wasn't he?"

Larsen grunted. "You'd better lay off being so durned polite to that guy. He's worse looking than old Whiskers up above. And —say, I'd bet he did break into the wreck of our plane, too!"

He told her about the cartridge and the floating stuff. Probably the lagoon was not very deep; at the same time, it did look like a crazy piece of business. They were still discussing this when they came to the village, and Larsen chased off a pig that was rooting around the fish, and went for his first aid kit.

"You lay bare your upper works and I'll fix up the cuts and bruises. Apparently the fuselage wasn't injured, but your wings sure need attention."

She complied, and he annointed the scratches and bruise on her forehead, while she laughed into his eyes and commented on his lack of skill. Then he went to work at the fish, beside the creek. No pan fry unless he provided a skillet, and Susie; it was bake or nothing. So bake it was, and they both enjoyed the results exceedingly, and sat over a smoke together afterward. There was, naturally, only one topic of conversation.

"I had a notion from the start that there was a lunatic around, either me or him," said Larsen. "I'm glad it's him. As I figured, he found papers or something in that chest and pretty soon convinced himself that he was Weston Gunn. And yet—"

SUSIE nodded as he paused, her eyes thoughtful.

"Yes. And yet! That theory just doesn't account for a lot of little things. How, for instance—"

"Don't ask questions!" barked Larsen. "I'm sick of asking myself questions that have no answer. I know it doesn't account for some things. But it makes others plausible. Only a lunatic would think of diving, apparently at night, to get a gun from the wreck; and those guns aren't easy to get, either. And how did he know you were in trouble, when he was here on this side of the island? And how does he know all that Gunner Gunn rigmarole which sounds so natural and truthful?"

"I thought you said not to ask questions?" Her eyes were dancing at him now. "I think we can prove up something by getting that pistol he gave me. Remember, he said he had put into it what he stole from King Somebody."

"King Kaiwas," said Larsen. "That was all hogwash."

"Maybe not. I'm going to see for myself."

"Do you want me to get the pistol for you?"

"No, we'll both go get it, after I lie down for an hour. Suit you?"

Larsen regarded her for a moment. "Susie, about anything you say or do suits me. That is how I feel about it. I'm nuts like Mr. Gunn, I think; I've known you for two or three hundred years, maybe longer."

Her eyes widened on him. "I hope you find me better preserved than he is?"

"Heaps!" Larsen chuckled, and came to his feet. "See you later. I'm going to try and find you that skillet. When you get ready to climb, I'll be at the beach."

He sauntered off, repressing an inclination to light another cigarette. Smokes were running low.

IN SHIRT and shorts he got into the boat and paddled out. As he had thought, the lagoon was not too deep, with the tide fast going out, to see the bottom. It was not long before he found what he was looking for—the wreckage of the bomber. She had gone down hard enough to be ripped to pieces on the sharp coral; he could see little except wreckage. A diver would not have far to go in order to reach her. Yes, it was

possible after all. He could see nothing of any guns, however.

He went on, out to where the reef that stopped the surf was exposed at low tide. Here he explored, with care; there were pools and pits in the coral, and after some search he came upon just the thing he was after—half a huge shell, glinting white and purple, that would make a good pot or skillet. He salvaged it and worked his way back to the beach. He would get some more fish later on, he figured; maybe take Susie out fishing.

"No you won't," said the voice of Gunner Gunn. Larsen peered around sharply and saw nothing at all.

"Won't what?" he demanded.

"Take the wench out fishing. Not unless you do it before sunset. Tomorrow you'll not have the chance."

"What the devil! Are you a mind-reader?" Larsen riposted.

The voice laughed. "Gimlet Eye Gunn knows all that's going on, shipmate."

"Listen, come off that Gunn stuff, will you?" Larsen was angry. "I got a glimpse of you, so you needn't hide out and think you can impress me. Come on into sight and talk like a white man."

"I am a white man, lad. My father was a wheelwright in Devon, and I'm as white as you, so don't be impudent. I warn you, take good care of that cutlass o' mine; you'll have better use for it than sticking hens, ere long."

"Yeah. Sticking pigs," said Larsen irreverently.

"No; better game than that, matey. And when those Japs show up, you lay low and leave 'em to Gunner Gunn, savvy?"

"What Japs?"

"The ones that are heading this way. Remember, leave 'em to me! I've waited two hunnerd year for this day and I don't want my fun spoiled."

"You're off the beam. Get wise to yourself," retorted Larsen. Mr. Gunn's laugh cackled and died away.

The boat pulled well up on the white sand in the center of the beach, Larsen took the big shell and headed for the village. He was irritated anew by thought of Mr. Gunn as a mind-reader; still, maybe he had thought out loud about taking Susie fishing, he reflected. Or the unseen speaker might have hit the mark with a long shot. This notion made him feel more cheerful about it all.

Japs? Nonsense. There were none here, and none were likely to come here. He very well knew that all the Japs in these waters were having a very tough time of it, thanks to Uncle Sam's fleets by sea and air. There was no reason for any Japs to come here, and nothing to come for.

He found Susie rested, and drying her hair in the sun, told her about it, and showed her the big shell. She agreed with him that any talk of Japs coming here was most likely just so much hot air.

"Still, anything's possible. And, Pete!" she went on. "I think I've hit the explanation of our friend Gunn."

"Tell me, and I'll tell you whether you have or not," said he.

"Not ready yet; let me think it out a little further. Do you know anything about psychology?"

"Just enough to know that you're the prettiest picture I ever saw, right now."

She smiled, and began to braid her hair. "Thanks for the skillet. If it doesn't go to pieces in the fire, it ought to work. So Mr. Gunn thinks we'd better go fishing this afternoon, does he? Not a bad idea. I'd enjoy it—after we get the pistol."

"Okay," said Larsen. "Mind if I ask a personal question?"

"That depends. Ask it and see, Pete."

"Well," he hesitated awkwardly. "It's like this. How free are you?"

"Free?" She eyed him questioningly. "I was born free, Pete."

"Sure. That wouldn't prevent me, for example, being tied up to a gal, only I'm not. I did have one in Brooklyn but she married a Marine. What about you?"

"Oh, is that what you mean!" She broke into laughter, and went on with her hair. "Well, Pete, this is a desert island except for Mr. Gunn, and if we're not rescued for five or ten years I expect we'll have to get married, just to be conventional—won't we?"

"Hell's bells, I didn't ask you to joke about it," he observed stiffly.

"You certainly didn't expect me to be serious about it, did you?" she rejoined in severe accents. "At least here in broad daylight." Her eyes twinkled. "You ought to reserve such questions for moonlight or at least starlight, with the romantic whisper of waves on the beach— Oh, Pete! Help— there's an ant between my toes and it's biting—"

Larsen stooped to the rescue and they both broke into a gale of laughter. But a red ant stuffed with explosive formic acid is no joke; Susie was limping for the rest of the afternoon.

VII

ONCE more they climbed the winding trail that led up the south peak.

Larsen regarded this business of the pistol as pure nonsense, and said so, but Susie was stubborn about it. Anyhow, said she, the pistol would make a grand memento to keep, and she meant to have it and whatever was in it.

"Are you going nuts too?" Larsen asked rudely, as he climbed along behind her. "If there is a powder charge and a bullet, it'll be spoiled long ago."

"Oh, you don't understand at all, Pete! I've formed a theory, and I think it may be correct. If Gunn really stole something from King Kaiwas and stuffed it into that big pistol—"

"Rats!" cut in Larsen impatiently. "This maniac running around loose wouldn't know anything about it. He's just trying a hoax."

"I don't think so. Why not wait and see, before we argue? Anyhow, it'll prove my theory either right or wrong."

"Okay," he said, and let it go at that.

It was early afternoon, brilliant sunlight was beating down on the island, and the widespread sea below was a rich, surf-tipped blue; not at all the sort of day in which to indulge rattlebrained fancies. Larsen kept an eye on the holes in the rock. He was getting fed up with the place, and for lack of other occupation was thinking about trying a bit of exploration. Those caves might be interesting.

"If our tame lunatic found old Gimlet Eye in one of them, no telling what we might find," he said.

"He's not a lunatic," she rejoined firmly. "However, we won't argue it now. Isn't it lovely up here, after the dead heat down in the valley? This sea breeze is grand! I'd like to live up here all the time!"

"With the bats?" queried Larsen. "You need an elevator with a penthouse, Susie."

"Why must you be so dreadfully practical? Aren't you even a little bit romantic?"

Larsen grunted. "Too much so, maybe. Five or ten years from now I might let myself go and be all romantic."

He heard her bubbling laugh but she made no reply.

THEY reached the shelf at last, where Mr. Gunn sat keeping his eternal lookout to the southern skies. Larsen, who had fetched along some bits of wood, added these to the pile at one side to serve as beacon if the chance came to make a signal, then joined her in front of the blank-faced figure with its staring blue eyes of vigil.

"It seems almost too bad to leave him without any weapon at all," said Susie. "Look, this pistol is wired to his hand—"

The thin wire was weak with rust. It was easily broken loose from the leathery old paw of Mr. Gunn, and Susie took the long-barreled pistol. This was very green with corrosion, but the bore was enormous in size.

"Brass," commented Larsen. "Boy! Look at the size of the bore! Darned near fifty calibre, I'll bet. One of those bullets would sure blow daylight into a guy. What's that black patch in the handle?"

Susie rubbed the black smear set into the butt, and a glitter rewarded her.

"It's a silver plate, Pete! Give me a rag or something—"

"Use your skirt. It's your gun, not mine."

With a grimace, she complied, rubbing away at the silver until it came partly clear and revealed a name neatly chased. "Weston Gunn, 1744" it read. Larsen looked at it and nodded.

"The guy was real, all right. Is there any load inside?"

The flintlock hammer would not work. Sticking his finger down the bore, Larsen felt stoppage, and got out his pocketknife. This had a corkscrew blade which was long enough to reach the stoppage. He worked away and presently drew out the knife and some bits of rotten cloth.

"Something there, sure enough, Susie! The knife won't reach any farther. Here, I'll get a stick."

His pile of wood yielded a thin stick, and they worked away, getting nothing except more of the ancient cloth. Susie's eyes were dancing excitedly; she took the stick and went at the job with determination, while Larsen went down the trail until he could see the western horizon. The ocean was all blank and empty, the loom of land westward was more distinct than usual; he could make out mountains against the horizon. A sudden cry from Susie reached him.

"Pete! Come here, quick!"

He hurried back. More cloth, and some tufts of cotton, lay in her lap; she was staring at something in her palm, and held it out to him.

"Look! Look at these—they rolled out—they were stuffed in with the cotton—diamonds, Pete! And two pearls!"

SHE could scarcely speak for excitement, and no wonder. Larsen looked down at two shimmering, iridescent globules as large as peas, and half a dozen stones of larger size that flashed dully in the sunlight.

"Diamonds?" he repeated. "By gosh! Say, they don't look like much to me. I've seen better looking diamonds from a dime store. But those two pearls are beauties."

"They're all beauties!" she exclaimed. "The diamonds are the old rose cut, or table, cut stones, like all very old ones. They're not very valuable, compared to diamonds as they're cut today, but they're real, and they're lovely."

It was some time before her ecstasy could calm down, as they discussed the stones one by one and fingered them in the sunlight. Then she looked up at him, her lips half-parted, her cheeks flushed.

"Pete, I guess this does prove my theory."

"You win, sister," he said. "Whatever the theory is, you win."

"It's split personality," she rejoined. "This poor fellow whom you call a lunatic is someone who perhaps got badly hurt. Maybe his head was injured. His own personality dropped out of sight, and the personality of Gunn took hold of him. To all intents and purposes he *is* Gunn. That would explain everything, even how he knew what was here in the pistol. Do you see?"

Larsen stared at her. "Is that stuff scientific?"

"Well, it is in a way. A split personality is recognized—"

"Personality be hanged," said Larsen. "I don't savvy your line. It's just the same as I've said all along—the guy is a lunatic."

"But it's not the same!" she protested. "He's no lunatic. For the time being, he actually is Weston Gunn, Pete. He'll come out of it—maybe with some sudden shock, maybe with an operation—"

"All right; now you listen to me a minute," he broke in, smiling. "You stick to your theory, I'll stick to mine. Let's leave it like that. Doesn't matter a durn who's right and who's wrong, but it matters a lot if we get worked up and lose our tempers. I don't want to get into a row with you for another couple hundred years, maybe longer. Suit you?"

Her features rippled with mirth. "Don't you think I could hold my own in a row?"

"Sure. But you're so sweet and nice, Susie, that I don't ever want to row with you," he said gravely.

She gave him a quick look. "Why, I believe you mean it! Thanks, Pete. I don't know about being sweet, but I think you're nice. It's a bargain. Now, what'll I do with these things?" She held up the gems in her palm.

"I'd say put 'em back where they come from. You can always hang on to the pistol and nobody will think twice about it."

"Good head!" She fell to work, wrapping diamonds and pearls in the bits of ancient cotton again and carefully stuffing them

down the pistol-barrel, then sending the pieces of rotten cloth after them. "There! No danger of losing them now. Shall we go? I'm looking forward to that fishing trip, Pete."

"So'm I," he said. "Come along."

THEY started down the trail together. From the shelf where Mr. Gunn stood watch the eastern beach and lagoon, and the farther sea in that direction, was invisible; but a little below, as the descending path turned the side of the peak, it all came into sight. Larsen halted.

"By golly, I'll have to hand it to the guy! He said Japs were coming—and there they are!"

He pointed to a smoke that broke the far northeast horizon. Then, as Susie said nothing, he turned to her. To his astonishment she was white as death; her eyes were dilated upon the smoke, and she was quivering from head to foot.

"Good lord! What's wrong with you, Susie?" he demanded. She took a deep breath.

"Japs—you scared me, Pete, Japs!" she said unsteadily. "I thought you really saw them coming. You don't know what it does to one—after being a prisoner—after being in a concentration camp so long—I guess my heart just turned over."

"Why, you poor kid!" Swift compassion seized him; he reached out and patted her arm, awkwardly. "I just said that, about Japs. Maybe that smoke isn't coming this way at all. They're not likely to be Japs, anyhow. We cleaned all those lice off the ocean up Leyte way and sent 'em crawling home. Cheer up and forget it. I didn't know how you felt."

She forced a smile. "Sorry, Pete. I just can't help it, I guess. I thought I could take anything, but well, I just can't stand the thought of Japs again, and it knocked me cold for a minute. I'm all right now."

"Sure you are. Come along, and forget all about that smoke. It doesn't mean anything—probably one of our ships going by. If it comes any closer, I'll send up a smoke from the beacon."

She clutched at his arm. "No, no, don't

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do that! It might—might be a Jap ship and might draw them."

"Okay," said Larsen without demur, and started on down the trail. He did not blame her a mite for being upset. By the stories he had heard from occupants of Jap concentration and prison camps, they were plain hell; it was a wonder she could be as bright as she normally showed herself.

They came down to the beach, got hooks and bait, shed their footgear and started out in the rubber dinghy. From here, the horizon smoke was not visible at all.

Larsen paddled nearly out to the reef, then drifted, and when Susie pulled in the first fish, her delight was something to see. Her foot was still swollen from the ant bite and Larsen inspected it.

"Most people's feet are ugly as the devil. Yours are pretty," said he critically. "Good to look at. Same as your face."

"So I have a face like a foot, have I?" she retorted.

Larsen chuckled.

"You should worry, gal. There goes your line—pull on it!"

The fish bit ravenously. An hour passed, and they had more than enough for their wants. Susie suggested keeping at it and leaving some on the beach for Gimlet Eye, so they tarried longer and hauled in more fish, until Larsen, who had quietly been keeping an eye on the eastern horizon, saw what he feared.

"You paddle back, while I get some of these fish cleaned," he said, and she complied laughingly, and made a good job of it. This, naturally, kept her facing toward the shore.

When they reached it, Larsen maneuvered with no little skill to give her no chance of looking seaward, and finally thrust upon her the fish he had already cleaned.

"Take these along, and I'll follow with the rest," he said. "You can be looking up some small firewood, and I'll get more when I come along."

"Right," she said, and departed.

When she was out of sight, Larsen drew a breath of relief and stood up, looking seaward. No doubt about it; the smoke was a smudge, and was coming closer.

"I told you them Japs would be along," said the voice of Mr. Gunn, from nowhere.

VIII

"AREN'T you man enough to come out and show yourself?" demanded Larsen.

"Not me, shipmate. You can see all o' me you want up on the hill," replied Mr. Gunn with a cackle. "You keep that old cutlass of mine handy, mind, and if a pinch comes, you can take to the caves wi' the lass. A proper wench she is! But don't let the Japs scare you, and don't bother with 'em. Gimlet Eye Gunn will take care of them."

"You're a bit previous. We don't know that this smoke means Japs. Maybe it's one of our own craft."

"You'll see, matey. A half disabled Jap ship full o' guns, that's what she is, running from the fight. Trust to Gunner Gunn and keep your chin up. There'll be no fight till morning. See you later."

"Loony as they come," reflected Larsen, irritated as usual by the voice. "It's a wonder he didn't tell the color of the Japs' eyes and hair! All bosh. Most likely it's one of our own sub-chasers or P. T. boats. Still, we don't want to get Susie worked up about it; a darned lucky thing she wasn't here to overhear that loony talk. I hope the guy has cleared out for good. Still, one thing he said did make sense—about the caves."

He left some of the fish; he had forgotten to tell Mr. Gunn about them, but that did not matter. With the rest, he made for the village and found Susie hard at work. He gave his personal attention to the fire, without ostentation, carefully selecting only dry wood that would make little smoke, and hoped for the best.

The big shell served its purpose admirably. Susie, flushed and adorable, turned out a perfectly scrumptious fish dinner that made even the iron-hard ration biscuits taste like something. The cooking done, Larson thoughtfully doused the fire.

"You're a swell cook, Susie," he said.

"I'm going to be real sorry when we get rescued."

"The larder isn't very extensive," she said. "You'd better make up your mind to butcher a pig. The cutlass would do."

"Maybe we can get Gimlet Eye to do it for us. How you feeling?"

"Tight like a drum," she said, laughing. "Why?"

"Just wondered." He looked up, and suppressed a groan. The stars were out, night had come, but he caught a radiance that touched the peaks above and was gone. "Y'know, Susie, there might be some bad news for you."

"Meaning what, Pete? Oh, look! Is that moonlight already? On the high trees?"

"Nope. Moon is about full and won't be up till later," he said, and sighed. "Darn it all! I was hoping it wouldn't come true, but I guess that settles the matter. I had a chat with Gimlet Eye after you left me, or he had a chat with me. He was quite positive that the Japs were on the way. A disabled destroyer or some such craft, he said."

"Oh, I see." She was silent for an instant. "All right, Pete. Let's have it. You mean the light that comes and goes?"

"I'm afraid so. They may be running to find shelter inside the reef, and using the searchlight. If there's an opening in the reef, they'd know it. Those ringtails know everything about all these islands."

"Well," she said after a minute, "I guess we'd better know the worst, hadn't we? Shall we go over to the beach and see?"

"That's the girl. You don't need to go. You can stay here. Scared?"

"Horribly," she admitted. "But I'd sooner go with you."

"All right. Fine! Give me your hand and I'll pilot you."

He took her hand, and it was cold. He knew she was hard hit.

"You knew all the time that smoke was coming, didn't you?" she asked.

"Saw it while we were fishing."

They said no more, but followed the path to the beach. And, when they emerged into the open, the worst was fairly obvious. They stood looking, still hand in hand.

The ship had come close; it showed no lights, but the radiant finger of a searchlight was touching the water, a little to the southward; evidently the reef-channel had been picked up and the vessel was coming in for shelter.

"Let's not holler till we're hurt," Larsen said quietly. "We're taking a lot for granted; may be one of our own ships putting in to make repairs. Let's sit down, and be comfortable, till we learn the truth. They won't attempt a landing tonight, anyhow. If they do, we can take to the caves, remember."

They stretched out in the warm sand, watching that finger of light. Then, under the stars, they could see the black blob of the ship itself; it was coming slowly through the reef opening. The searchlight swept up, touched on the peaks and the beach, and Larsen was glad of the leafy screen that sheltered them from watching binoculars.

The thrum of engines fell quiet. The rattle of chain going out, the heavy splash of an anchor, reached them; the searchlight was abruptly doused. Voices came across the water to them—the chattering voices of Japanese. Pete Larsen heard his companion gasp, then her hand came searching for him.

"Japs, sure enough! Pete, I—I'm frightfully scared—I can't stand it, Pete! I can't stand it—"

Her arms came around him, her head was against his chest; she was sobbing in dry gasps. He held her to him, saying little, trying to hearten her. He patted her cheek and found it wet, and kissed it.

"I'll see you safe, sweetheart," he said, with a tenderness he had never suspected in himself. "We'll see it through together. Just don't you think about them at all; shut your eyes and think about Des Moines and everything you're going back to, one of these fine days."

So he talked soothingly, as to a child, while she clung to him and her gasping breath quieted. After a long while he realized that she must be asleep; and very carefully, in order not to disturb her, he stretched out and made himself comfortable in the sand.

There were no sounds of any disembark-

ing from the vessel. A faint sound of metal and hammering came from her; they must be at work on her engines, he reflected, losing no time in getting at repairs. Perhaps they would not come ashore at all, and upon this comforting thought he dozed off.

HE AWAKENED with a start, to the chill breath of dawn. The skies were gray. Susie lay with her arms still around him, and she was smiling as she slept. For a little, Larsen did not move. He did not want to wake her, but knew that he must. He bent his head and kissed her, felt her arms tighten about him and her eyes opened. She looked up at him and smiled, then alarm flashed into her face.

"It's all right, Susie," he said. "Morning now. Sorry I had to wake you."

"Good heavens! Have I been asleep here—"

He kissed her again. She responded, and smiled anew into his eyes.

"Thank you, Pete. You're a dear boy. I was terribly panicky, wasn't I? Now I think I'll be all right."

He helped her to rise. They looked at the vessel lying so close.

"You run along," he said. "There's still a little coffee powder left; make a tiny fire. I'll stay and keep an eye on things, and be along after a while."

"All right," she replied, and departed.

Larsen retreated out of sight of the vessel, and got the stiffness out of his bones with a few setting-up exercises, then came back to a point of vantage. The vessel was a destroyer, long and slim and battle-gray. She was low in the water, and most of her amidships section and bridge was a tangled mass of gaunt wreckage.

"Oh, boy! She got a bomb, all right; too bad it wasn't a bigger one," he thought. "Disabled her but didn't cripple her engines."

Whistles sounded and she came to life; the sun was just showing in a rim of golden scarlet.

Men moved about her decks. The off-sea breeze stirred the sunrise flag at her stern and brought to Larsen's nostrils the odors of food cooking. This reminded him, and he made his way back to the village, pausing en route for a hasty wash at the creek. He found a tiny fire ablaze, water bubbling over it in the big shell, and Susie greeted him brightly.

"Good morning! All ready? This will finish up the coffee. What news?"

"Nothing very bad," he replied. "Looks like a destroyer that caught a bomb and she needs repairs. We won't need to worry for a while, anyhow."

"Think they'll come ashore?"

He nodded. "Sure. For fresh water if for nothing else."

She mixed the coffee and they took turns drinking from the shell. Larsen got out the cigarettes, and these were down to three. He cut one in two.

"Might as well finish 'em. Can't smoke if we're hiding out."

She nodded, held a brand for a light, then scattered the fire, scooping sand upon it. They sat smoking.

"So this is the end of our desert island peace!" she observed. "I'd give a good deal if I had a gun, Pete. I could use it."

He started. "Hello! I forgot about Gimlet Eye. Wonder if he really did get a gun out of our ship? He said to trust him, that he'd take care of the Japs. That guy is liable to go nuts and get us all blown to hell. Have you got some matches?"

"Yes. Why?"

"You may have to take charge of the beacon near Mr. Gunn, up above. That spot isn't visible from where the destroyer lies. If they do come ashore, I want you to get up there and take to the caves—"

"I'll not!" she flashed out.

"Yes you will, too. There may be one of our ships or planes coming along to look up this Jap baby and we'll have to light the beacon. I'll depend on you."

She gave up protest. "All right, then. But we'll keep an eye on them first."

They finished their smoke. He stood up. "Ready?"

"No. Anything but. No help for it, though."

She threw him a quick smile. "All set, Pete! Got your cutlass? Let's go."

IX

THEY came into sight of the beach and lagoon. Larsen led the way carefully to a spot under cover of the brush. Dropping into the sand, they wormed forward and got a complete view of the destroyer.

Larsen made an effort to count the Japs who were swarming over her wreckage. Mighty close to a hundred, he figured; she must have lost plenty. They were hard at work getting wreckage cleared away. Some of her guns were disabled. It was not hard to guess that she was here making only temporary repairs, perhaps to her controls, in order to make a run for Singapore or elsewhere and get a thorough working over.

The vessel was lying a little south of the beach, not more than a hundred yards offshore. The voices of the Japs reached clearly across the water. An officer amid the bridge wreckage shouted an order, and Susie gasped.

"Pete! He said to make the boats ready. They're coming ashore!"

"How d'you know what he said?"

She shivered. "You spend three endless years in a prison camp, and you'll speak Japanese too. Had we better make for the caves?"

"Not yet," he replied. "Take it easy. I'm curious to see if old Gimlet Eye will do anything. So far he's called the turn every time. Maybe he will again."

They lay waiting and watching; it was nervous work.

The activity aboard the vessel paused. Voices called back and forth; Susie translated. Only two boats were serviceable, the others were destroyed. First one, then another boat was put out, with some difficulty, having to be lowered by hand. Men swarmed into them, arms glittered, orders were given. Casks were sent down.

"Pete! They mean to stay!" muttered Susie, ashen-faced. "They're coming for water, also to occupy the island—"

"Okay," said Larsen. "Sit tight."

His composure heartened her. The two boats put forth oars and headed for the beach at the creek mouth, directly in front of where the two were hidden. As they came

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nearer, Larsen began to think about discretion. Might be best to sneak away and make for the peak. If he only had a rifle, he could hold that twisting trail against an army! But he had none. And if—

Bam-bam-bam!

Larsen jumped a foot, as a sharp, abrupt burst sounded. Fifty calibre, he thought. Around the boats, the water spurted. Wild yells went up—then the roaring staccato burst went on, filling the air with tumultuous sound. The machine-gun raked the two boats; the heavy bullets smashed flesh and wood alike. One boat sank. The other, filled with dead and dying men, drifted slowly toward shore. A few heads showed in the water, the remorseless gun battered them down. The drifting boat foundered in the shallows; nothing alive was left in her.

The destroyer broke into life. A machine-gun chattered; a Bofors gun was depressed and sent its needle shells roaring at the shore. Larsen, tensed, had seen where that deadly fire came from; the Japs saw too—from the jumbled pile of coral rocks at the north end of the lagoon. Shells burst, rock flew; the .50-calibre gun was silent.

Peace descended on the islet, after the blether of sound. The rank odor of cordite drifted across the lagoon. Already the Japs were in motion. A stream of them was taking to the water to swim ashore. Larsen reached out and touched the girl beside him.

"Get going," he said. "They've silenced him. Move! I'll be along."

She inched back, rose, and then disappeared.

Swimming, holding weapons above the water, the file of Japs was halfway to shore when, without warning, the pile of coral rocks again erupted fire and fury. Larsen marveled at how that bucking, jumping gun could be so perfectly controlled. Bullets swept the string of heads.

Instantly the destroyer's guns leaped into action, pouring a stream of fire at the unseen machine-gun. Its attention was switched to them. Its bullets raked their decks, struck down the gun crews, sowed death and destruction—then it fell silent. More shells burst all around it, but it gave back no reply.

"They got him," thought Larsen. Most of the swimmers had vanished. Then, rising, stooping low, he dashed forward across the beach.

The foundered boat was rolling over, spilling dead men and guns at the water's edge, and the temptation was too strong to be resisted. Larsen flung himself forward as he came to the water. He saw a rapid-fire carbine, with an attached drum, and grabbed it, rolled over, came up and took to his heels. As he reached the brush, machine-gun fire swept through the trees—they had seen him, all right.

He fell flat, worked his way ahead into the brush, and ran. Then he remembered that up above, one turn of the trail would involve full exposure to those below. He thought of Susie, and with leaping heart flung himself forward. That white dress of hers against the rock—

HE POUNDED up the trail as fast as he could leg it. Sure enough! The rattle of a machine-gun echoed from the lagoon; he heard the bullets whistle overhead. There was the open stretch—and she was across! The gun fell silent. Without a pause, Larsen went at it full tilt, put on his best spurt of speed—and was halfway to safety when the gun began again. A second gun joined in. At the last dozen feet he lost his nerve and fell to his face, and crawled. Bullets were whining just above him—he could feel the wind of them, could hear the splashing crackle of them against the rock face.

But he came through safely, and then halted, regardless of Susie calling him forward.

The gun in his hands was strange to him, but he quickly got the hang of it. Then, face down, he inched forward to get sight of the lagoon. It came into his vision. He saw the destroyer lying almost under him, and sighted carefully at the group of men about the stern machine-guns. Then he let them have it—a quick burst, and another. He saw them falling, and stayed his hand, and hurriedly withdrew.

A deadly but totally ineffective fire was

opened. Shells and bullets stormed against the cliff, searching out every foot of the exposed portion. Grinning delightedly, Larsen hopped ahead to where Susie was waiting.

"So you must have your fun, eh?" she said tartly. "Why did you have to risk your neck getting that gun, and then shooting it?"

"That's what it's for," he retorted. "And I needed it so no Japs could get along this path. Listen to the ringtails wasting shells on the rock!"

Then he stopped and suddenly was dragging her to the very verge of the trail, his eyes wild, his features contorted with excitement.

"Look!" he cried. "Look! Do you see what I do?"

He pointed to a triangle of dots against the southern sky. She looked at them.

"Yes, sure—you mean—"

"Get up there quick and light that beacon smoke! Quick!" he barked.

WITH no further questions, she turned and ran. Larsen feasted his eyes on that triangle of planes. It seemed to him that they were swinging around as though to point this way—then he hurriedly went streaking back to where he could get a sight of the lagoon. The hail of bullets and shells had ceased. But, when he cautiously took a squint at the destroyer, he perceived why the planes might have turned, conceivably. Gimlet Eye Gunn must have had some explosive bullets; a plume of smoke was going up from the wreckage in her waist and the Japs were fighting it frantically. The gun crews had abandoned their guns to join in the work.

Larsen thought rapidly. No ghost had been working that .50-calibre gun, but it had remained silent. Now, with the Japs busy as the devil, was his chance to get down to the beach with his weapon and get around to that clump of rocks—

With an effort, he resisted. No. Gunner Gunn must take his chance; the Japs had seen him and Susie going up the trail and would have concentrated on the peak. If any of them had reached the shore, he must wait here. He dared not risk abandoning Susie to peril. He drew back, sighed, inspected his automatic rifle, and looked up again at the sky. He could not repress a yell of wild delight. They were coming, sure enough! And from the shelf, spiraling up above the peak, was asending the signal-smoke—Susie had worked fast!

"Coming like bats out of hell—Lightnings!" he cried, distinguishing them now. "Oh, boy! If those Japs will only get rattled and go to shooting, there won't be any mistake about it—"

He waited, tense and agonized.

The triangle in the sky was certainly making for the island. The smoke had drawn their attention. Perhaps they were a patrol looking for remnants of the broken Jap fleet. The signal was mounting in black puffs, they could not miss it! Larsen stole forward once more, hoping desperately that the Japs would see their peril and open fire. He caught sight of the lagoon and the destroyer, and broke into frantic whispers of jubilation. The Japs had scattered to the guns.

The long muzzles of the Bofor guns were swinging and elevating; next moment they began to jump, and Larsen hugged himself.

Flak blossomed blackly in the sky. The twin-boomed Lightnings could make no error now, nor did they. Down they came and down, contemptuous of the bursts around them; then, no higher than the peaks of the island, they leveled off, and Larsen saw the tiny black dots of falling bombs, as the skies roared and the three ships angled sharply out of the flak and wheeled southward.

HE PUT down his weapon and danced excitedly, waving and yelling till he was hoarse.

The water spurted around the destroyer; then she vomited flame and smoke. The three Lightnings had already turned, and came back, swooping low. Their guns chattered into the belching smoke and they were gone.

Larsen turned and legged it up the trail in blazing excitement. He met Susie coming toward him, and seizing her, hugged her with jubilant, incoherent cries. They were

at the turn, just below where Mr. Gunn sat, and a sudden roaring swept down at them as a Lightning swooped close. They waved frantically; the pilot dipped his wings in signal, and then zoomed away to rejoin his fellows.

"They're gone!" cried Susie in sudden dismay. "Pete—they're going! Leaving us!"

"Going? Sure. No place to stop here. But you can be sure they're talking now by radio, and we'll see either a Catalina or a P. T. come over the horizon before very long—come on, come on, look at the destroyer! She's done for!"

And he dragged her, laughing and talking at once, down the trail. They both quite forgot, in their excitement, that at least one or two of those Japs had come ashore.

X

JUST before they gained sight of the lagoon, a tremendous bursting explosion sent flame high in air, scorching them, rocking the very earth under them, and the concussion knocked them both flat on the trail. A volume of black smoke belched up; bits of wood, metal, flesh, came showering down on everything.

"She's gone up!" yelled Larson hoarsely. "Hurray! Look, look!"

A little farther, and the lagoon opened before them; they stood in stricken silence, staring at the incredible scene. The destroyer was gone, indeed, and it was quite apparent that none of the Japs who had been aboard her would reach shore. A pall of oily smoke hung over the water; all of it was aflame. The escaped oil and gasoline was burning fiercely there, sealing the fate of any who had escaped the explosion.

"Lord!" exclaimed Larsen, delighted yet appalled. "That's the way some of our ships went at Pearl Harbor.

"I lost a brother there," said Susie, very soberly.

"Well, you don't need to be scared of any Japs now. Look here, let's go see what's happened to old Gimlet Eye! After all, we owe him just about everything—maybe he's dead or wounded. Must be, since he quit firing long ago."

"Yes, we owe him plenty," she assented, and stepped out. Larsen, hugging the automatic rifle, followed closely.

The abrupt, deadening silence that hung over everything was significant. The offset breeze drifted the oily smoke from the lagoon across the beach and trees, and with it odors that made Susie wrinkle up her nose in acute distaste—odors of cordite and oil and burning flesh.

"Hey, where's your big pistol?" demanded Larsen suddenly.

She flung him a laughing glance over her shoulder. "Under the cooking shell, down at camp. I left it there on purpose."

"Okay. Look out for that piece of a Jap in the path ahead—"

Not a piece of a Jap, but a twisted fragment of metal, fallen from the debris of the explosion. She stepped around it and went on. The drift of burning oil darkened the sunlight and dimmed it overhead; the trees below looked almost foggy.

They came down without incident. Now, abruptly, Larsen remembered what he had feared about one or two Japs coming ashore from the swimming party. He said nothing but kept his finger on the trigger and probed the trees and brush with quick vigilance.

He began to regret his haste to look up Mr. Gunn. This oily mist along the beach was highly unpleasant. However, as they skirted the shore around to the clump of rocks and he discerned no sign of life anywhere, his alarm decreased. A lucky thing Gunn had blown their boats out of the water at the first go!

THEY reached the rocks, and here was clearer air, away from the oily murk. Clambering up, they came to the slightly higher level of the coral chunks—and there before them was dispelled the final mystery of Weston Gunn.

The machine-gun must have been struck squarely—it lay toppled over to one side. And near it, a smear of blood on his face, lay the dark, ragged figure whose face Larsen had glimpsed—a figure all tatters, bare-

foot, gaunt. Susie dropped on her knees beside it and a sharp cry escaped her.

"Pete! He's not dead—get some water, quick!"

Larsen clambered over the coral lumps and brought a cloth back dripping. He found Susie parting the long beard and carefully examining the sunken features. She took the wet cloth, began to mop the man's head, and gave Larsen an amazed glance.

"Look! It can't be—but it is!"

"Yeah. What?"

"Why, Doctor Bowe, of course! There's no shell wound, either. His head must have been struck by a piece of flying coral—it's a jagged hurt, but doesn't look like a concussion. Yes, it's Doctor Bowe—and he was right with us all the time—oh! There's a bad scar, near the new wound—"

She washed the hurt well and bound it up with the wet cloth. Then she turned and looked at Larsen, her eyes wondering.

"Do you see? It's exactly like I said. He hurt his head somehow, perhaps in getting Gunn's mummy out and put together—and that did it!"

"Knocked him insane, you mean?"

She frowned. "Well, if you want to put it that way, I suppose so. When he came to himself, he wasn't himself at all, but Gunn. Don't you see?"

Larsen nodded. "Sure. He was a lunatic, like I said."

"Oh, you're hopeless!" she said in an awed tone. "Gunn's personality had possession of him. I've heard of such things . . ."

She broke off sharply. A low groan came from the unconscious man. His eyes opened. He put a hand to his head, groaned again, then responded as Susie helped him to sit up. He stared blankly around.

"Hello! Where am I? What's happened?" he said. It was certainly not the voice of Mr. Gunn.

His eyes widened at sight of Susie. "Oh! It's Susan Mason—am I dreaming?"

Her bubbling laugh sounded. "No, Dr. Bowe, you're not dreaming. I'm here. Your head is hurt, you know."

"Yes, yes. I remember now," he said. "I was getting that skeleton or mummy down from the cave—must have been a nasty fall, but I don't remember—hello! Who's this man?"

LARSEN met the stare with a grin.

"Why, you remember me, don't you? Aren't you Gimlet Eye Gunn?"

The other frowned. "Gunn? I never heard the name. No, I'm Clyde Bowe—"

He broke off, evidently bewildered and puzzled. Susan caught Larsen's eye and made violent signs not to say any more. He nodded in agreement. A miracle had happened, and explanations could come later. Rescue would also come in due course, but one thing he knew; between this girl and him there would always be a powerful bond; they would remember the secret, sacred island where the past merged with the present, hear again the voice of a long-dead gunner and his hoarse laughter echoing among the barren rocks. The war in the Pacific would mean for them the miracle of Gimlet Eye Gunn.

. . . No matter what happened the door wasn't to be opened till the time appointed

Rapport

BY MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

MARCO the Mentalist was seated before his dressing-room mirror, cold-creaming the grease paint from his long bony face, when the note was delivered. He glanced at it, idly at first—for he was always receiving mash-notes from some fluttery female in his audience, fascinated by him because he had "read her mind" during his usual three-a-day performance. Nor was he bad-looking; glancing back at his reflection in the mirror, he frowned slightly, aware of a pouchy dissipated sag beneath his eyes and under his chin. Not that forty-eight was too old for a stage and night-club mentalist with the arrogant good-looks of a fallen Lucifer —but it wasn't young, either. Another five years, of this, eating hurriedly in one-arm joints across from the theatre, moving from one town to another as his novelty in the present locality began to wane. . . .

His thoughts broke off sharply as his

Heading by Herbert Freeman

piercing black eyes focused again on the note. *Elias Rutherford,* it was signed. A man, not a woman; and from the cramped old-fashioned handwriting, a rather elderly man. Marco, still rubbing cold cream into his face, read the first few lines more carefully—and sat up straight.

Dear Sir: (the note said formally, with a slight tone of amused condescension).

I attended your last performance tonight, and have decided that you are either a great psychic—or a very great fraud. I am a wealthy man, but not a happy one—the latter state due largely to the loss of my wife and our unborn child several years ago. If I had then believed in the power of one human mind to transmit thought to another, my wife and baby might now be alive. . . . But I did not then, and do not now, believe in such a psychic phenomenon beyond the realm of mere coincidence. However, I am willing to accept proof of anything that modern science has not as yet disproved. The possibility haunts me.

If you can give me indisputable proof that a normal human being of your choice can transmit or receive thoughts, from me or from some person of my choosing, I will give you my personal check for $20,000. Will you call at the above address tomorrow at ten, if you elect to accept this challenge? If you decline, I shall assume that you are an ordinary stage-trickster, honest enough to admit it. If you try to fool me, however, I shall feel obligated to expose you to the press, and to the American Society for Psychic Research whose genuine efforts to separate the true from the false are not fully appreciated by the layman.

Sincerely, your servant,
Elias Rutherford

Marco sucked in a long breath, his eyes narrowing as they lingered on that *$20,000.* Some old crackpot, he mused. Lonely and bored, brooding over the death of his wife —which, obviously, he half-believed he had "sensed" in time to warn her. He was always running into people like that; Marco laughed shortly. Naive, wide-eyed innocents with long-winded tales of a "dream" they had had of some relative at the very moment of his death. One would think they could recognize a coincidence for what it was—but, no! People worried about their loved ones dying a hundred times a day, but when it finally happened, and happened the very way they feared it was going to, nobody could convince them that they had not experienced a moment of "clairvoyance" or "telepathy."

This Rutherford, Marco decided with a wry smile, was just such a fool; perhaps a bit more intelligent than the average, but nagged by regret that he had not given the idea more thought. It might be easy to convince him of something he wanted to believe, anyhow, the mentalist told himself, narrow-eyed. Just another rich old codger who had more of the worldly goods than he deserved— Marco scowled bitterly. Fat soft capitalist. . . ! Probably never had worked a day in his life. Never sweated to warm up a cold audience! Never lived on hamburgers between bookings, or slept in a railroad station because he didn't have the price of a hotel room. . . !

THE mentalist stood up, mouth twitching slightly like that of a hungry cat stalking an unsuspecting bird on the garden walk. With swift hands that trembled a little in their eagerness, he wiped the cream from his face and strode out into the night-shrouded city. A way of collecting that $20,000 had just occurred to him—a foolproof way of proving that "telepathy" is a scientific fact, if one first puts the cart before the horse!

Hurrying down the dark street to the little hotel where he was staying this week, Marco stopped by a little bookshop, open all night for the convenience of late-abeds like himself. For some time he browsed about, then slipped a small volume under his coat. Paying for a second book, which he tossed into a trashcan on his way, the mentalist almost ran the rest of the way to his hotel, and locked himself in. There, assured of a complete privacy, he opened the book he had bought: a treatise on medical hypnotism and suggestion.

He read all night, committing much of

the book to memory. And when, as the dingy light of dawn seeped in through his window, he drifted off to sleep, Marco was smiling. . . .

Promptly at ten o'clock, the great brass knocker on Elias Rutherford's front door boomed hollow notice of his arrival. Marco, in the only good suit he had, was ushered into a great paneled study, furnished in deep red leather. A fire was burning in the ornate fireplace, and a shriveled little man, with the cold gray eyes of a fish and a nose and pointed chin that almost met, was poking at the blazing logs peevishly.

As Marco entered, he turned and regarded him with the shrewdest expression the mentalist had ever encountered. He fidgetted, trying to smile and look at ease as the old man waved him to one of the deep chairs. But when, moments later, Elias Rutherford was still staring at him without uttering a word, Marco began to wish he had not come.

This, he realized abruptly, was not going to be an easy customer to fool. He swallowed twice, then in a matter-of-fact tone, began the spiel he had decided upon as a build-up. He had gone to some trouble to look up theories on telepathy, in order to sound convincing.

"Mr. Rutherford . . . May I trouble you for a pack of cards? A new pack, if possible. I am not," he smiled, "going to show you any magic tricks, believe me. I should merely like to give you the ESP test perfected by Dr. Rhine of Duke University. . . . You are familiar with it, perhaps? Cards are turned by one person, while another tries to receive the impression of their color or number. Thirty-seven right out of 52 tries is so far beyond mathematical chance as to indicate extra-sensory perception. . . ."

The old man nodded, to his dismay. With a shrug, he produced a sealed pack of cards from a small buhl cabinet and handed them to the mentalist with a manner as matter-of-fact as Marco's own.

"Oh, yes," Rutherford grunted. "Rhine. Dr. P. K. McCowan, of Dumfries. And Dunne, the English philosopher. I've studied all their pet theories. But, Mr. Marco, I may as well tell you that I have subjected myself to every known ESP test. Ever since . . . since my wife, Nadja . . ." The old man's voice broke slightly, betraying the grief that seemed as poignant now as on that day years ago. "I . . . She was in a department store, buying me a small present for my birthday. She . . . she entered a self-service elevator—at precisely 3:15, I later learned. I was at home with a slight cold, dozing by the fire here in this same chair.

"Suddenly I . . . I began dreaming that I saw her walk through a small sliding door. There was a sign hanging on that door, a sign Nadja could not read because she was Polish and knew very little English. But . . . I am sure she sent me an *impression* of that sign, puzzled by it and by the fact that nobody else seemed to be using the elevator. . . .

"*She* took it, however." The old man brought out the words harshly. "And it fell five stories with her the moment she pressed the release button. The sign, of course, said: 'OUT OF ORDER, TAKE STAIRS.' Tell me," he broke off, fixing Marco with his cold eyes, "is it possible that my wife could read a sign without knowing what it said, and yet project its meaning to someone who could—to me? I . . . I *saw* that sign, you see. Let's say I *dreamed* I saw it, and I could have phoned the store in time to warn her not to take that elevator . . . *Or could I?*" Rutherford smiled drily. "That, Mr. Marco, is what I am willing to pay $20,000 to find out! The balance of my estate will then be bequeathed to the American Society for Psychic Research—to find out *how* and *why* the transmission of thought is possible, and perhaps save others from the tragedy that I might have averted."

MARCO suppressed a smile. Then the old hellion *was* suggestible! He already half-believed in, or wanted to believe in, something that his logic told him could not be so. Also, he was obsessed with that "acid test" which, at some later date, he planned to give this charlatan who claimed to be able to broadcast and receive "thought-waves." Like a walkie-talkie set. (Which, actually, was the gimmick Marco and his

pretty blonde assistant used, to "transmit thoughts" from aisle to stage.) The rest of it was done with a clever system of signals: ""*A*nd guess *w*hat? Guess. . . ?" The answer was: *A* gold *w*atch, *g*irl's. Then Marco, still blindfolded, "read minds" from the stage as his assistant picked up the written questions handed her by those who had "problems." She held them to her forehead, then read them aloud in a whisper to some third person seated in the audience, who then dramatically was allowed to tear up the paper. Up on the stage, Marco, hearing it read through walkie-talkie earphones set into his phony black-velvet blindfold, then answered the question, much to the mystification of all concerned.

He grinned now, eyeing Elias Rutherford warily. If he could fool a whole audience for cakes-and-coffee money, surely he could trick this senile old codger into believing that he, Marco, was possessed of a sixth sense! It all hinged on the old magician's trick of misdirection.

Smiling, more at ease now, he settled back in the deep chair and put his fingertips together in a pedantic manner calculated to impress even the most scientific-minded.

"Really, sir," Marco went into the act he had planned last night in his shabby hotel room, "there is nothing supernatural about telepathy and clairvoyance. We know that sounds and pictures can be transmitted by means of electrical waves broadcast by man-made machinery . . . yet we are unwilling to credit this same power to that most intricate of all machines, the human mind."

MARCO'S voice, casually, had sunk to a monotone. His piercing eyes were fixed on Rutherford's, holding them—while between his fingers he swung a small silver pencil. Back and forth it swung, back and forth, until the old man's eyes were impelled to follow its rhythmic motion. Intent on Marco's learned discourse, he did not seem to be aware of what the stage-trickster was trying to do. . . .

". . . a radio, a human radio, that's what the mind is," the mentalist droned on. "It is simply a matter of finding someone whose mind operates on the same frequency as one's own; the same wave-length, let us say. Many of us think in *words,* and can therefore transmit our thoughts only in words, or groups of syllables, or letters. Only another such mind could, therefore, be expected to receive its telepathic message. Other minds project *pictures,* rather than words; let us say, a television broadcast, to be picked up only by similarly trained minds. . . ."

Back and forth, the silver pencil swung. *Back, forth, back, forth. . . .* Old Mr. Rutherford blinked at it drowsily—and Marco suppressed a grin of triumph. But his soothing voice did not alter its monotone:

". . . very simple, if we could only grasp the principle as we now understand the principle of radio-reception and transmission. We have at least invented a machine for measuring the wave-impulses of the mind; I refer to the encephalograph, used in tests for epilepsy and certain other types of insanity. Why is not such a machine used to experiment with psychic, as well as medical, phenomena of the mind? It well may be, and in the very near future! Insanity itself used to be considered a supernatural thing. A man was 'possessed of devils' when the electrical process called *thought* went awry. . . . Do you hear me, Mr. Rutherford?" Marco threw in softly. "Do-you-hear-me. . . ?"

The old man swayed slightly, eyes fixed glassily now on that swinging pencil. He nodded with the mechanical obedience of a marionette.

"I . . . hear . . . you. . . ."

Marco leaned forward, fixing the glazed eyes of the old man with his own compelling gaze.

"Repeat after me," he commanded softly. "Repeat: 'Tom, Tom, the piper's son . . . Stole a pig and away he run'. . . ."

"Tom . . . Tom . . . the piper's . . ." Elias Rutherford, in a dull voice like a sleepwalker, repeated the nursery rhyme.

"Now!" Marco said quietly. "You will remember that—do you understand? Remember those words! They are the words you will use in the test, when you send them as a telepathic message to me. Understand?"

"I . . . understand . . ." Rutherford droned.

"Tomorrow night, at nine!" Marco commanded.

"At . . . nine . . ." the old man repeated, like an obedient child.

Then Marco made a small sharp sound, by snapping his fingers. The other blinked and started, rubbing his eyes. The mentalist smiled.

"Am I boring you?" he asked politely, as though nothing had occurred to break the trend of his conversation. "I mean, about the mind being a radio. It is quite possible that our minds are in tune—or *en rapport*, as the French say, Mr. Rutherford. If it so happens that my thinking-apparatus operates on the same frequency as yours, I am confident that you could send me a thought-message . . . oh, tomorrow night, let's say. At eight. . . ?" Marco suggested slyly.

"At nine," said the old man firmly, with a slight frown of puzzlement as he said it. "I . . . feel, for some reason, that it should be at nine."

"As you wish," Marco agreed smoothly—trying not let a gleam of triumph in his eyes betray that his plan had worked.

Elias Rutherford had been hypnotized, neatly and completely. He had been given a post-hypnotic suggestion, which he would follow now without ever understanding why he did so.

TOMORROW night, promptly at nine, the old man would "project" that nursery rhyme as his test-message, believing it to have originated in his own head—not that of the receiver! And $20,000 would change hands—because old Rutherford could not help but be impressed by this startling proof of mental telegraphy. There might even be, Marco considered with a half-smile, ways to get the millionaire to bequeath *him* the balance of his estate, rather than some idiotic Society for Psychic Research! Crackpots! Seekers after sensation and bizarre amusement. These metaphysical groups went all-out to kid themselves, the mentalist thought wryly; but he himself, for all that he made his living with the so-called "black arts," was a materialist.

"Very well," he agreed now pleasantly, as though humoring Elias Rutherford in some whim, "nine it shall be. But . . . for your own sake, and for mine, sir, I must ask that you enforce certain test-conditions while the experiment is going on. Remember," his dark eyes twinkled, "I am a professional magician. There might be ways, other than through telepathy, that I could get hold of your message."

The millionaire smiled coldly. "I thought of that," he said drily. "There are many tricksters in the field. Oh, I know all about these table-tapping devices and cheese-cloth ectoplasm, used by professional mediums! And I have read that the great Houdini himself had a standing offer of one thousand dollars to anyone who could produce psychic phenomena which he could not duplicate by scientific means. You may consider me the same sort of hard-boiled skeptic!"

"Splendid!" Marco said smoothly. "I was hoping you would take that very attitude, sir. How shall we work it, then? In separate rooms? And under guard?"

"In separate rooms . . . across town," Rutherford snapped. "I will remain here in this library, with someone you can trust. A member of the police?" he suggested slyly, his keen old eyes fixed on Marco's bland countenance. "You would not object—since you say there is to be no question of fraud?"

Marco's expression did not waver. He bowed graciously, accustomed to eyes that were critical and observant of his every facial tremor.

"As you wish," he agreed. "And I shall be confined to, say, my own hotel room across town? I am not a wealthy man," he gestured apologetically. "It is a very small, dingy hotel—with no fire-escape at the single window of my fifth-story room. You may station a police guard outside the door, if you like, and tie or handcuff me to my bed. The phone will be in the hall, so there is no question of my conferring with any accomplice who might get hold of your message. But I must request that you write it down on a piece of paper, at the hour we agreed upon. Write it, reread it to yourself, concentrate on the word-picture it presents.

That way, perhaps I can receive your message in letters, words, or pictures—whichever type of thought-projection is most suitable as a means of communication between your mind and mine."

Rutherford chuckled, eyeing the mentalist with, almost, a grudging respect—the respect of one hard-headed realist for another of the same caliber.

"You certainly have your . . . your patter down to perfection!" he commented, amused. "One would think we were planning an actual scientific test in, say, wireless communication!"

"Perhaps we are," Marco answered him simply. "Perhaps we are, Mr. Rutherford. . . . Tomorrow night, then. At nine. I shall expect your . . . ah . . . friends from the police at my hotel promptly, a short time before that hour. I suggest, too, that you seal the doors and windows with paraffin, as an added precaution. They say," he drawled, "every man has a price—and how do you know your police guard could not be bribed?"

"I intend to pick one who can neither be bribed nor tricked!" the old man said. "You will not find me an easy man to hoodwink, sir! Not for $20,000," he chuckled good-humoredly, "which it took me a great many years of hard work to acquire!"

Marco laughed, and bowed himself through the door of the great paneled room. Outside on the street again, as he signaled for a passing cab, his face hardened. Damned old miser! Well, tomorrow night he would shake him loose from some of that "hard-earned" cash—$20,000 of it—as easily as one could take candy from a baby!

AT EIGHT-THIRTY the following night, Marco the Mentalist was absent from his usual nightly performance of standing, blindfolded, on a spot-lighted stage and reading "thought-messages" sent by those in his audience.

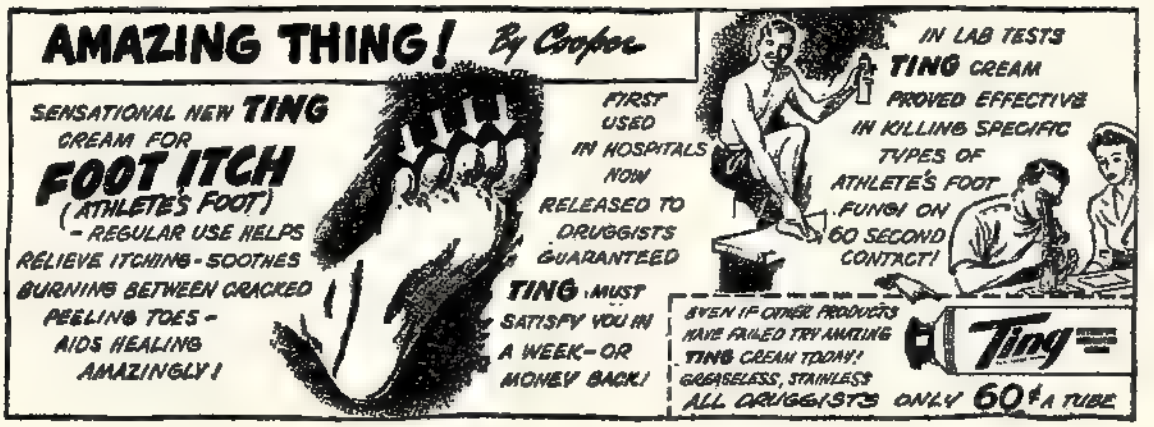
Instead, pleading sickness to the annoyed stage manager of his second-rate theatre, he waited in his room, heart pounding with excitement.

A knock on the door roused him. He opened it quickly, to find two plainclothesmen from the bunco squad standing there, grinning at him. One dangled a pair of handcuffs, whistling cheerfully, while the other went carefully over every inch of Marco's cheap little room, looking for mechanical devices such as a short-wave radio or wireless outfit.

The mentalist lounged against the cracked plaster wall while they searched, smoking lazily—and looking more than ever like a fallen Lucifer in his ornate dressing gown, with the smoke drifting up past his half-closed eyes and enigmatic smile.

One of the officers glanced at him. "What's this all about, Marco? The Chief sent us, but he didn't say what was the gimmick. Publicity stunt?"

Marco shrugged. "Something like that, Reilly. You'll know after it's over. Just be sure to seal me up in this room so even a termite couldn't get in. *And don't open the*



door, whatever happens. Not until ten o'clock. Understand? One hour."

"We got our orders," the detective grunted.

Some minutes later, Marco the Mentalist sat smiling on his unmade bed, with his wrists handcuffed to the iron head—alone with his thoughts. Or Elias Rutherford's, he mused, laughing silently.

The tiny room, with its now-sealed and locked door and window, had become stifling in the short time he had been waiting. Sweat beaded Marco's forehead and upper lip, but he leaned back patiently against the head of the bed, smoking and thinking.

Twenty grand! Just for sitting here, waiting for an old fool to "think" of a nursery rhyme his skillful hypnotism had already planted in his mind! The mentalist chuckled, dreaming of Monte Carlo, of the Riviera; of sleek blond women who would never give a second-rate vaudeville artist a second glance; of sunlight, and leisure, and long amusing hours that he could never have afforded, as a four-a-day entertainer. And it need never end!

Because, his thoughts leaped ahead eagerly, this need not be the only fraud he would perpetrate on some gullible, wealthy old coot! Why, he could establish a cult! The idle rich went for psychic nonsense, hook, line, and sinker. Telepathy! Why hadn't he thought of the hypnotic angle before? It was a natural, a lead-pipe cinch to pick from some idiot's mind a few words that had already been planted there!

The mentalist laughed softly, eyes half-closed as he lay on his bed, waiting and looking with amusement at that paraffin-sealed door behind which two minions of the law were waiting also. Thoughts! Nothing but thoughts—invisible, inaudible little electric waves, according to his spiel to Rutherford—could penetrate this fort of his own cleverness. Twenty thousand bucks! Twenty thousand. . . . Marco's eyes closed drowsily, dreaming of a ridiculous scene that was taking place in a big paneled library across town. An old man, earnestly scribbling a nonsense rhyme on a piece of paper. Concentrating on it, his withered lips moving, his will focused on the idea of projecting the words through space to . . .

MARCO stiffened, wrinkling his thin arched nose. He sat up painfully, spread-eagled against the bed-head by his handcuffed wrists. For, quite suddenly, to his horror, he had smelled something. . . .

Smoke!

With a sharp intake of breath he glanced down at the bedclothes and saw a tiny tongue of flame licking hungrily at the sheets, at his wool overcoat recently cleaned with . . . Gasoline! He smelled the fumes of it now, as the flame reached it and glazed higher where the coat lay carelessly flung across the bed at his feet. He tried to kick it off, struggling to reach it, with his wrists straining against their steel shackles. . . . But the movement only served to fan the blaze.

It leaped higher, ate deeper, finding sudden food in the cotton mattress. Marco coughed and cried out hoarsely, drawing up his feet.

"Help!" he yelled. "Hey! You cops out there—my bed's on fire! Get me out of here. . . !"

For answer, the two plainclothesmen in the hall outside laughed lightly.

"No kiddin'?" one of them drawled.

"Yeah? The Chief said you might try to pull something like that," the other jeered. "No dice, Marco—we don't open this door till ten o'clock. And it's only nine-thirty-five. . . ."

"No, listen!" Marco shouted, half-laughing. "This is no gag; I set fire to the bed with my cigarette. Get me out of this. . . !"

Laughter. A few jesting catcalls from the men outside his door.

Marco's smile vanished. Sweat that was half from the mounting heat, half from horror at his predicament, popped out on his face and ran down his quivering mouth. The wicked little flames were ringing him in now, creeping toward his drawn-up feet. Smoke billowed from the charred bedclothes, stinging his eyes and nose so that he could hardly see. Coughing and gagging, straining at his handcuffs, Marco screamed.

"Please! For God's sake! I'm not kid-

ding. . . ! I . . . I'm burning to death! I . . . can't breathe. . . !"

Laughter, ribald and derisive. One of the men was even going away. Going downstairs for a drink; a cool bubbling drink. . . . Marco gagged, swallowing smoke. His throat was raw now, his eyes streaming. The tiny sealed room had filled to the ceiling with black, stifling clouds. And the mattress blazed, scorching his shoes now, singeing the hairs on his legs. Like a mocking red-and-yellow demon, the fire reached for him with graceful hands that blistered his face . . . that . . . that seared his staring eyes. . . !

"Rutherford!" he screamed, insanely. *"Rutherford—help me! I'm . . . burning! I'm . . . burning . . . Rutherford, help! Help. . . !"*

The fire reached, enfolding him in its red arms. Marco screamed, a long tearing sound of agony . . . through which, it seemed, somewhere, that he could hear a bell ringing. A phone. . . . A telephone bell . . . ringing and ringing, with frantic insistence. . . .

HE AWOKE, painfully, in a hospital bed; awoke to darkness, and the pungent smell of antiseptic, and the low murmur of a doctor's voice conferring with a nurse. There was, he dimly recognized, also another voice—an old man's treble, sharp and sour.

"Doctor, will he. . . - How much of the body surface was burned?"

"About a third. Oh, he'll live, I think. But . . . even with plastic surgery. . . . Well, he won't be a pretty sight."

"What a pity!" The nurse's voice. "He was . . . awfully good-looking. I . . . I saw his act on the stage last week. Wonderful, isn't he? I mean, golly, the way he just reads your mind. . . !"

AT HER thrilled tone, gullible and utterly mystified, Marco the Mentalist almost smiled through his agony and tried to stir. Why . . . why, he was a mass of bandages! What . . . where . . .? Who was the gauze-swaddled mummy?

He remembered, groaning. The hoax, the great hoax by which he was to have fleeced an old man of twenty thousand dollars. It was gone now. And . . . and his face; his arrogant good looks, his charm, his stage magnetism—all that was gone, too! Marco whimpered deep in his throat, cursing himself, cursing his own avarice.

And then:

"Wonderful?" old Rutherford's voice was murmuring, oddly, in answer to the young nurse. "Why . . . yes, my dear. I believe Marco was genuinely able to transmit and receive thought. I shall, of course, pay all his hospital expenses—since, in a way, his disfigurement is my fault. And he will receive my check for twenty thousand as agreed. Tell him that the moment he awakens, will you, Doctor? It . . . it might console him. And I owe it to him. A . . . sort of bet."

"Twenty thousand?" the nurse gasped. "He *won* it, Mr. Rutherford?"

"Yes. Marco proved that telepathy is possible . . . and practical, even under test-conditions," Elias Rutherford answered softly. "I . . . I am convinced, personally. And . . . I shall leave my fortune to the ASPR for further research into . . . what well may be a new branch of science, rather than a mere superstitious theory. Marco and I did send and receive a telepathic message," the old man mutttered. "Although . . . in reverse. I was transmitting to him a silly bit of nursery rhyme, which I intended using as a test-message . . . when all at once, very clearly, there came into mind a picture of Marco handcuffed to his bed, *surrounded by flames! I . . . I . . .* It was so vivid an impression that I could not restrain an impulse to phone his hotel—and thereby saved him from a horrible death. So, we did succeed in establishing . . . a *rapport.*"

Under the bandages Marco's burned face contorted. Muffled sounds came through the gauze that covered his blistered mouth.

He was laughing, wildly. . . .

The Ring of Bastet

Heading by Fred Humiston

IT HAD snowed earlier, then rained until the snow had melted into muddy slush; now a shrewish wind came scolding up from the Bay, and the sad black puddles that were the dregs of the storm began to glaze and shine with a thin film of ice beneath the street lamps' glare. Walking became hazardous, with the outcome of each step in doubt.

"*Parbleu, mon ami,*" Jules de Grandin

By Seabury Quinn

muttered as he dug his pointed chin two inches deeper into the fur collar of his coat, "I do not like this weather. *Nom d'un poisson!*" his feet slipped on the icy pavement and he caromed into me. "Let us seek the shelter. I do not wish to nurse a broken arm; also I am villainously hungry."

I nodded agreement. I'd treated half a dozen fractures due to falls on ice-glazed streets that winter, and had no wish to spend the next six weeks or so encased in splints and bandages. "Here's the Squire Grill. They have good steaks, if you'd care to try—"

"*Morbleu,* I would attack a dead raw horse without seasoning!" he interjected. "My friend, it is that I am hungry like a lady-wolf with sixteen pups."

The Squire Grill was warm and cozy. Windsor chairs of dark oak were drawn up to the tables, shaded lamplight fell on red-checked tablecloths, behind the bar a man in a white jacket polished glasses and at the far end of the room there blazed an open fire quite large enough to have burnt a Medieval heretic.

"*Une eau-de-vie, pour l'amour de Dieu,*" de Grandin told the waitress, then as she looked blank, "A brandy, if you please, and bring her with the speed of an antelope, Mademoiselle."

The girl gave him a friendly smile—women always smiled at Jules de Grandin—then, to me, "And yours, sir?"

"Oh, an old fashioned without too much fruit, if you please, then two steaks, medium, French fries, lettuce and tomato salad—"

"And mugs of beer and apple tart and copious pots of coffee, *s'il vous plaît,*" the little Frenchman completed the order.

The look of pleased anticipation on his face became an expression of ecstasy as he cut into his steak, black as charcoal on the outside, and pale watermelon pink within. He raised his eyes and seemed to contemplate some vision of supernal joy. "*Ah,*" he murmured, "*Ah, mon Dieu—*"

The door swung open and a blast of frigid air came rowdying in, and with it came a party of young folks, healthy, obviously ravenously hungry, riotous with gaiety. They made a noisy entrance, moved with more than necessary noise to the long table set before the fireplace, and began calling loudly for service. Evidently they were expected, for a waitress hurried up with a tray of Martinis, and was back with another before the first round was finished.

A young man who had plainly had more than a modest quantum of pot-valiency all ready rose and held his glass up. "Lad-eez an' gen'men," he announced a bit unsteadily, "to—to th' bride'n groom; may all their troubles be little ones, an'—"

"Hold on, there, Freddy, hold it!" warned a blonde girl whose pink cheeks glowed with something more than the cold. "They aren't married yet—"

The young man seemed to take this under advisement. "U'm," he drew his hand across his face. "Tha's so, they ain't. Very well, then: Lad-eez an' gen'men, *les fiancés.* May they live long an' prosper!"

"Speech! Speech!" the youngsters chorused, pounding on the table with their cutlery. "You tell 'em, Scotty!"

A tall young man in a crew cut, tweed jacket and tan slacks rose in response to the demand. He was a good-looking youngster, blond, high-colored, with a casual not-long-out-of-college look that labeled him a junior executive in some advertising agency or slickpaper magazine's editorial staff. "My friends," he began, but:

"The ring, Scott—put your brand on her!" his tablemates clamored. "Stand up, Bina, it won't hurt—much!"

Jules de Grandin's talk of cats and mice seemed utterly irrelevant

THE laughing girl who rose in response to the summons was small and delicate and looked as if she had been molded in fragile, daintily tinted porcelain. Her nose and brow and chin were aquiline but delicately proportioned, her skin exquisite. Framed by hair of almost startling blackness that fell to her shoulders and was cut across the forehead in straight bangs, her face had the look of one of those stylized pictures of a Renaissance saint. Coupled with the blush that washed up her pale cheeks her smile gave her a look of almost pious embarrassment. Demurely as a nun about to take the veil or a bride at her wedding ceremony, she held out a slim, fragile hand and the young man slipped a heavy ring on its third finger.

"Seal the bargain! Seal the bargain!" the demand rose like a rhythmed chant, and in obedience to it the girl lifted her face for his kiss. The flush deepened in her cheeks, and she sat down quickly as two waitresses came up with trays of steaming food and in their wake the *cellérier* with an ice bucket and a magnum of champagne.

De Grandin grinned delightedly at me above the rim of his beer mug. *"C'est très joli, n'est-ce-pas?"* he asked. *"Dites,* youth is marvelous, my friend; it is a pity that it must be wasted on those too young to appreciate it. If—"

A shout came from the merrymakers' table. "Look at Bina! She's passing out!"

I glanced across the room. The girl on whose hand we had seen the ring placed had fallen back in her chair, but the look on her face was not one of alcoholic stupor. Her scarlet lipstick—the sole makeup on her face—seemed suddenly to stand out, vivid as a fresh wound, as if what little color she possessed had retreated behind it, changing the whole aspect of her countenance. Her lips hung open slackly, tried to move and failed, and in her eyes was a look of fascination such as might have been there if she saw a viper crawling toward her. "That girl's ill!" I exclaimed.

"Pardieu, my friend, you are so right!" de Grandin agreed. *"C'est—"*

The girl rose slowly, like one who makes as little noise as possible before she takes to panic flight, and walked toward the door of the restaurant. Her petella reflexes seemed to weaken as she stepped; her knees flexed and her feet kicked aimlessly, as if she suffered motor ataxia. Then suddenly her knees buckled and her legs twisted under her. She fell as limply, as flaccidly, as a filled sack from which the grain had run out, or a rag doll emptied of its sawdust. We saw the shape of total fear form on her face as we reached her. She turned wide, frightened eyes on us, and I noted that although her pupils were large and black they were rimmed by dark green irises. "My legs," she whimpered in a voice that seemed to shake with chill. "I can't move them—there's no feeling in them; but they're cold. Cold!"

"I am Dr. Jules de Grandin, this is Dr. Samuel Trowbridge," the little Frenchman introduced us as we knelt beside the fallen girl. Then, "You have no pain, Mademoiselle? No feeling of—"

"No feeling in my legs at all, sir. They're numb—and cold."

"U'm?" he raised the hem of her full, pleated brown wool-jersey dress and took the calf of one slim leg between his thumb and forefinger. "You do not feel?" he pinched the firm flesh till it showed white with the pressure.

"No, sir."

I noted that she wore no stockings and shook my head in disapproval.

De Grandin nodded. "Cold," he pronounced. *"Froid comme une grenouille."*

"No wonder," I shot back. "You'd be cold as a frog, too, if you went traipsing out in sub-freezing weather with no more stockings than a—"

"Ah bah," he cut me off. "Do not let Madame Grundy sway your judgment, Friend Trowbridge. It may be cold outside, but it is warm in here, and she sat almost within arm's length of that great fire. She should not have the chill."

I knelt beside him and laid a hand on the girl's leg. It was cold as a dead woman's, though the skin was smooth and sleek, without a sign of goose-flesh.

"You're sure you have no pain, Mademoiselle?" de Grandin asked again, leaning

close to look into her eyes and nostrils. "No headache, no pains in back or sides or limbs—"

"No, sir. Nothing, till just now when my legs gave way under me."

He took his clinical thermometer from his waistcoat, shook it and thrust it into her mouth, then placed his fingers on her wrist. At length: "Pulse and temperature are normal," he reported. "It is not anterior polio-myelitis. Except for this localized chill and inability to walk—"

"Berger's paresthenia?" I hazarded.

He nodded doubtfully. "Perhaps. At any rate, she cannot lie here. Let us take her home and see what we can do."

JOBINA HOUSTON lived in one of those cubicles known as "efficiency apartments"—a single fairly large room with furnishings designed to lead a double life. The small round dining table could be made into a bench by tilting up its top, a minuscule kitchenette, complete with porcelain sink and electric grill, lay in ambush behind a mirrored door, the divan opened out to form a bed, the chest of drawers did duty both as china closet and clothes press.

With the help of the blonde girl who had been ringleader at the party we got our patient into bed with hot water bottles at her feet and an electric pad under her.

De Grandin looked more puzzled than alarmed. "When did you first begin to notice this sensation of numbness, Mademoiselle?" he asked when we had made the girl as comfortable as possible.

She wrinkled her smooth brow. "I—I don't quite know," she answered. "It must have been—oh, no, that's silly!"

"Permit me to be judge of silliness and sense, if you please," he returned. "When was it that you first began to feel this chilly numbness?"

"We-ell, I *think* I first felt it just as Scott put the ring on my finger. You see," she hurried on, as if an autobiographical sketch would help us, "Scott Driggs and I both work at Bartlett, Babson, Butler and Breckenridge's advertising agency. He's in copy, I'm in production."

"Of course," he agreed as if he understood her perfectly. "And then, if you please?"

"Well, we sort of drifted together, and—and suddenly we both realized *this is it*, and so decided to get married, and—" One hand crept from the shrouding blankets as she spoke, and began to smooth the bedclothes gently. "So tonight we gave an engagement party, and—"

"Mademoiselle, where did that ring come from, if you please?" he interrupted.

"Why, from Scott, of course. He gave it to me tonight—"

"*Bien oui,* one understands all that, but what I most desire to know is where did he get it—where did it come from originally?"

"Why, I really don't know, sir. Scott and I don't really know much about each other. All we know is we're in love—that's plenty, isn't it?"

He nodded, but I noticed that his eyes were on the ring with a long, speculative stare. "You do not know who was his father?" he asked at length.

"Not really, sir. I understand he was some sort of scientist, an explorer or something; but he's been dead a long time. Scott hasn't any family. He finished college on his G. I. money and came to work at B. B. B. & B. about the same time I did. So, as I said, our work threw us together, and we—"

A small frown of annoyance gathered between de Grandin's brows as he stared in fascination at the ring. It was a heavy golden circlet, heavy as a man's seal ring, and set with some sort of green stone which might have been peridot or zircon, or even a ceramic cartouche. Certainly it could not have been more than semi-precious, for it had no luster, although its color was peculiarly lovely. The gem was deeply incised with what appeared to be a human figure swathed like an Egyptian mummy, but having a peculiarly malformed head. "You recognize him?" he asked as I completed my inspection. I shook my head. To the best of my knowledge I had never seen such a figure before.

"Tell me, Mademoiselle," he demanded, "just what did you mean when you said you began to feel this so strange numbness at

the moment your fiancé put this ring on your hand?"

"I don't quite know how to put it, sir, but I'll try. Scott had just put the ring on my finger when the dinner came, and as I took the cover off my *coq au vin* I happened to look toward the fireplace and saw—" she halted with a little shudder of revulsion.

"Yeah, what was it you saw?" he prompted.

"A cat."

"A cat? *Grand Dieu des porcs,* you mean a puss? Why not? Most restaurants have one."

"Ye-es, sir; I know. That's why I chose the Squire Grill for our party. They haven't one."

He raised his slim black brows. *"Qu'est-ce que c'est, Mademoiselle?"*

"You see, I'm one of those people who can't abide the sight of a cat. It terrifies me just to have one in the same room with me. There's a technical name for it. I forget—"

"Aelurophobia," he supplied. *"Bien,* my little, you are one of those who cannot stand the sight of a puss-cat. What next?"

"At first I thought I must have been mistaken, but there it was, coming right at me, snarling, and getting bigger with each step it took. When I first saw it, it was just an ordinary-sized cat, but by the time it had advanced three feet it was big as a large dog, and by the time it almost reached the table it seemed big as a lion."

"U'm? That is what terrified you?"

"Oh, you noticed how frightened I was?"

"But naturally. And then?"

"Then I began to feel all funny inside—as if everything had come loose, you know—and at the same time I felt my feet growing numb and cold, then my ankles, then my legs. I knew that if I didn't get away that awful thing would pounce on me as if I were a mouse, so I got up and started for the door, and then—" Her narrow shoulders moved in the suggestion of a shrug. "That's where you came in, sir."

He tweaked the needle points of his small blond mustache. "One sees." Turning to the girl who had come with us from the restaurant, he asked, "Will you be kind enough to stay with her tonight? She has sustained a shock, but seems to be progressing well. I do not think that you will need do more than keep her covered, but if by any chance you should need us—" He scribbled our 'phone number on a card and handed it to her.

"O.K., sir," the girl answered. "I'll ring you if I need you, but I don't expect I shall."

"THE trouble with today's young folks is that they don't know how to drink," I complained as we left Jobina's apartment. "That gang of kids had been pub crawling—stopping at every bar between their office and the Squire, probably—and Jobina thought she had to match Scott glass for glass. No wonder she thought she saw a monstrous cat. The only wonder is she didn't see a pink elephant or crocodile."

De Grandin chuckled. *"La, la,* to hear you talk one might suspect you wear long underwear and drive a horse instead of a car, Friend Trowbridge. I fear, however"—he sobered abruptly—"that her trouble stems from something more than too much *gaieté—"*

"D'ye mean to tell me that you think she saw that great cat?" I demanded.

"I think perhaps she did," he answered levelly.

"Nobody else did—"

"Notwithstanding that, it is entirely possible she saw what she claimed—"

"Humpf, when people see things that aren't there—"

"Perhaps it was there, spiritually, if not corporeally."

"Spiritually? What the devil—"

"Something not so far from that, my old," he agreed. "Suppose we call on young Driggs. He may be able to tell us something."

I expelled a long, annoyed breath. When he was in one of these secretive moods it was useless to question him, I knew from experience.

"How's Bina?" young Driggs greeted as he let us into his apartment something like a quarter-hour later.

"She seems recovering," the Frenchman answered noncommittally. "Meanwhile—"

"What was it? What was wrong with her?"

"One cannot say with certainty at this time. Perhaps you can enlighten us."

"*I?*"

"*Précisément.* You can, by example, tell us something of the history of the ring you put upon her finger just before her seizure."

The young man looked at him blankly. "I don't see what connection there could be between the ring and Bina's illness."

"Neither do I?" de Grandin confessed, "but if there is, what you can tell us may prove helpful. Where did it come from, if you know?"

"It belonged to my father. Dad was assistant curator of Egyptology at the Adelphi Museum in Brooklyn."

"Ah?" de Grandin bent a little forward in his chair. "It may be you can help us, after all, Monsieur. What of your father, if you please?"

"In 1898 or '99 the Museum sent him to Egypt, and while there he went up the Nile to Tel Basta, where—"

"Where the worship of Ubasti and Pasht, the cat-headed goddesses, was centered in the olden days," de Grandin interjected.

"Just so, sir. While Dad was poking round the old ruins he unearthed several little balls of what seemed like amber, except that it was much clearer, almost transparent. The Egyptian government had begun to clamp down on the exportation of relics, but Dad managed to smuggle three of the small spheres out with him. Two he gave to the Museum, the other one he kept.

"That little amber ball is among my earliest recollections. I used to look at it in awe, for buried in it was a gold ring with a green set, and when you held it to the light the stone seemed almost alive, as if it were an eye—a big green cat's eye—that looked at you.

"I don't know much about Egyptian antiques, my tastes all ran to other things, but I remember Dad once told me the ring had once belonged to a priest of Bastet, the cat-headed goddess who personified the beneficent principle of fire."

De Grandin nodded eagerly. "Quite yes, Monsieur. And then?"

"My father died while I was still in the Army, and Mother left the old house in Gates Avenue and went to live with some cousins out at Patchogue, and when she died that little amber envelope containing the old priest's ring was about all she left me."

He grinned a little self-consciously. "Any man can give his girl a diamond—if he has the price—but nobody but I could give Jobina such a ring as that I put on her finger tonight."

De Grandin tugged at his mustache until I feared that he would wrench it loose from his lip. "How did you get the ring from its envelope, Monsieur?" he asked.

"I had a jeweler cut it out. He had the devil of a time doing it, too. I'd always thought the capsule that enclosed it was amber, or perhaps resin, but it proved so hard that he broke several drills before he could succeed in cutting it away from the ring.

The Frenchman rose and held out his hand. "Thank you, my friend," he told our host. "I think that you have been most helpful."

"You're sure Jobina'll be all right?" the young man asked.

"Her progress has been satisfactory so far," de Grandin took refuge in that vagueness which physicians have used since the days of Hippocrates. "I see no reason why she should not make a quick, complete recovery."

"What's it all about?" I demanded as we reached the street. "You seem to see some connection between that ring and Jobina Houston's seizure, but—"

"Your guess is good as mine, perhaps a little better," he admitted as he held his stick up to signal a taxi. "My recollections of the cults of Bastet and Pasht are somewhat hazy. I must put on the *toque de pensée*—the how do you call him—thinking-hat?—before I can give you an opinion. At present I am stumbling in the dark like a blind man in a strange neighborhood."

It must have been sometime past midnight, for the moon which had come out

with the cessation of the storm had nearly set, when the ringing of the bedside telephone woke me. "Dr. Trowbridge speaking," I announced as I lifted the instrument.

The voice that answered me was high and thin with incipient hysteria. "This is Hazel Armstrong, Doctor—the girl you left with Jobina Houston, you know."

"Oh?"

"I'll say it's, Oh! She's gone."

"Eh? How's that?"

"She's gone, I tell you. Walked right out in her nightgown, and in this cold, too." Her voice broke like a smashing cup, and I could hear the sound of high-pitched sobbing over the wire.

"Stop crying!" I commanded sharply. "Stop it at once and tell me just what happened."

"I—I don't know, sir. I think she's gone crazy, and I'm scared. I did just as you told me, kept her covered up and kept the water bottles hot, but after a while I fell asleep. About ten minutes ago—maybe fifteen—I heard a noise and when I woke up I saw her standing by the door, about to go out. She'd pulled her nightgown down off the shoulders, and had a perfectly *terrible* look on her face. I said, 'Jobina, what in the world are you doing'? and then I stopped talking, for she looked at me and growled—growled like an animal, sir. I thought she was going to spring at me, and held a pillow up for a shield, but finally she turned away and went out the door. I didn't try to stop her—I was afraid!"

"Do not be frightened, Mademoiselle," de Grandin's voice came soothingly over the extension. "We shall go seeking her at once. Be good enough to leave the door unlocked."

"Unlocked? With a crazy woman on the rampage? Not me, sir. If you find her you knock three times on the door like this"—three sharp taps sounded as she struck the telephone with her nail—"and I'll let you in, but—"

"Very well," he agreed. "Have it that way, if you wish, Mademoiselle. We go in search of her at once."

"She can't have gone far in her nightclothes in such weather as this," I volunteered as we set out. "I only hope she doesn't develop pneumonia—"

"I greatly doubt she will," he comforted. "The inward fire—"

"The what—"

"No matter, I was only thinking aloud. To the right, if you please."

"But she lives in Raleigh Street, down that way—"

"We shall not find her there, my friend. She will be at Monsieur Driggs's unless I am far more mistaken than I think. When the cat goes mousing one goes to the mouse-hole to find her, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

I shook my head. This talk of cats and mice seemed utterly irrelevant.

THE automatic elevator took us up to the floor where Scott Driggs lived, and the heavy carpets on the hall floor made our footsteps noiseless as we hurried down the corridor. *"Ah?"* de Grandin murmured as we turned the corner and came in view of his apartment entrance. *"Ah-ha?"* The door hung open and a little stream of pallid lamplight dribbled out into the corridor.

Through the door leading to Scott's bedroom, which stood ajar, we saw them like the figures in a tableau. Scott lay motionless upon the bed, and standing by him, seeming more a phantom than a person, stood Jobina Houston.

But how changed! She wore a nightgown of sheer silver-blue crêpe, knife-pleated from the bosom, and flaring like an inverted lily-cup from the waist, but she had torn the bodice of the robe, or turned it down, so bust and shoulders were exposed, and she was clothed only from waist to insteps. Her straight-cut uncurled black hair hung about her face like that of some Egyptian woman pictured on the frescoes of a Pharaoh's tomb, and as we stepped across the sill she turned her face toward us.

Involuntarily I shrank back, for never on a human countenance had I seen such a look of savage hatred. Although her lids were lowered it seemed her eyes glared through the palpebrae, and the muscles round her mouth had stretched until the very contours of her face were altered. There was something feline—bestial—about it, and bestial

was the humming, growling sound that issued from her throat through tight-closed lips.

The glance—if you could call it that—she threw in our direction lasted but a second, then she turned toward the man on the bed. She moved with a peculiar gliding step, so silently, so furtively that it seemed that she hardly stepped at all, but rather as if she were drawn along by some force outside herself. I'd seen a cat move that way as it rushed in for the kill when it had finished stalking a bird.

I opened my mouth to shout a warning—or a protest, I don't know which—and de Grandin clapped his hand across my lips. "Be silent, species of an elephant!" he hissed, then stepped across the room as silently as the form moving toward the bed.

"Jobina Houston," he called softly, yet in a voice so cold and distinct it might have been the tinkle of a breaking icicle. "Jobina Houston, attend me! Do not be deceived, Jobina, God is not mocked. The Lord God overcame Osiris, threw down Memnon's altars and made desolate the temples of Bastet and Sechmet. Those Olden Ones, they have no being; they are but myths. The fires upon their altars have been cold a thousand years and more; no worshippers bow at their shrines, their priests and priestesses have shuddered into dust—"

The woman faltered, half turned toward him, seemed uncertain of her next step, and he walked quickly up to her, holding out his hand imperatively. "The ring!" he ordered sharply. "Give me the ring thou wearest without right, O maiden of the latter world!"

Slowly, like a subject under hypnosis, or a sleep-walker making an unconscious gesture, she raised her left hand, and I could have sworn the green stone of her ring glowed in the lamplight as if it were the living eye of a cat.

He drew the heavy circlet from the girl's slim finger and dropped it into his pocket. "Quick, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered, "take a blanket from the bed, envelope her in it as in a *camisole de force*—what you call the strait-jacket! Quickly, while her indecision lasts!"

I obeyed him mechanically, expecting every moment she would resist me ferociously, but to my astonishment she stood quiescent as a well trained horse when the groom puts the harness on it.

"*Bien,*" he ordered, "let us take her home and see that she is rendered docile with an opiate."

Half an hour later Jobina lay tucked in bed, sleeping under an injection of a half-grain of morphine. Hazel Armstrong had gone home, the city's noises had sunk to a low, muted hum, and in the east the stars were paling in the light of coming day.

"NOW maybe you'll condescend to tell me what it's all about?" I asked sarcastically as we drove home after turning Jobina over to the nurse for whom we'd telephoned the agency.

He raised his narrow shoulders in the sort of shrug that no one but a Frenchman can achieve and made one of those half-grunting, half-whinnying noises no one but a Frenchman can make. "To tell the plain, ungilded truth, I am not sure I know, myself," he confessed.

"But you must have had some idea—some relevant clue to it all," I protested.

"Yes and no. When Mademoiselle Jobina first showed signs of being overcome last night I thought as you did, that she had been taken ill, but the more I examined her the farther from a diagnosis I found myself. The sudden onset of her symptoms did not seem to match any disease I knew. Then when she told us about seeing the cat-thing almost at the moment Monsieur Scott put the ring on her finger I was still more puzzled. As you were at such pains to point out, no one else had seen the thing; the vision, if it may be called such, had been entirely subjective, something visible to her alone. It did not seem to me that she had drunk enough to see nonexistent animals, yet. . . . Then I observed the ring, and suddenly, something clicked in my memory. 'Where have you seen a ring like that, Jules de Grandin?' I asked me, and, 'At *Le Musée des Antiques* in Cairo,' I replied to me.

"'*Bien,* and what about that ring, Jules de Grandin?' I asked me.

"I searched my memory, trying to recall all that I knew about it as one struggles to recall the tune of a forgotten song.

"*Eh,* then I had it! It had been a priest's ring from Bubastis, the city of Ubasti or Bastet, the cat-headed goddess!

"Now Bastet, or Ubasti, was the sister and the wife of Ptah, who shaped the world and had his shrine at Memphis. She typified the benign influence of heat, the warming sun that made the grain to grow, the fire that gave men comfort. She was a mild and rather playful goddess, and therefore was depicted as a woman with a cat's head—the kind, affectionate and gentle pussy-cat we like to have about the house.

"*Eh bien,* she had a sister variously known as Sechmet and Merienptha who was her antithesis. That one represented the cruel principle of heat—the blazing sun that parched the fields and threw men down with sunstroke, the fire that ravaged and consumed, more, the blazing heat of savage, maddened passion. Now, strangely, though they represented bane and blessing to be had from the same thing, the sisters were depicted exactly alike—a woman swathed in mummy-clothes with a cat's head and wearing an uraeus topped by the sun's disc. Their temples stood nearby each other in the city of Bubastis, on the site of which the modern mud-village of Tel Basta stands.

"Good. When the Persians under Cambyses swarmed over Egypt in 525 B.C., the city of Bubastis was among the first they took. *Parbleu,* they were the *boches* of their day, those Persians; all that they could not steal they destroyed. So when the priests of Bastet and Sechmet heard they were about to come they hid their temples' treasures. Some they sunk in the Nile, some they buried, some few they took with them.

"As part of his ecclesiastical vesture the priest of Bastet and Sechmet wore a gold ring set with a green stone like a cat's eye. Many of these they enclosed in capsules of balsam resin, which was also an ingredient of their embalming. The rings thus held in their protective envelopes were buried in the earth—it was much easier to find a sphere larger than a golf ball than to hunt for a ring buried in the shifting sand.

"And then what happened I ask you? *Mordieu,* the Persians came, they pulled the city's walls down, razed the temples to the ground, killed all the people they could find, then went upon their way of conquest.

"The years went by, the Romans came, and after them the Arabs, and still those priestly rings lay buried in their envelopes of hardened balsam. Explorers delved among the ruins of the once great temple-city and dug these rings up and took them to museums. Young Driggs's father was one such. He brought back three rings of Bastet, two for his museum, one for himself, remember?"

"Yes," I nodded, "but what connection is there between the ring and Jobina's seizure, and—"

"Be patient, if you please," he interrupted. "I shall explain if you will give me time. Like priests of every cult and faith, the priests of ancient Egypt were a class apart. They were vowed to their gods, none others might serve at the altar, none others invoke divine aid, none others wear the priestly vestments. You comprehend?"

"I can't say that I do."

"*Eh,* then I must make the blueprint for you. As far as can be ascertained, such priestly rings as came to light were either melted down for their gold or taken to museums; none were ever worn. Jobina Houston seems to be the first one not initiated into the priesthood to wear a ring of Bastet on her finger.

"*Tiens,* those olden gods were jealous. They took offense at her wearing that ring. Bastet, or possibly Sechmet, appeared to her as in a vision, paralyzed her with fright, and finally took possession of her mind and body, driving her to make a makeshift imitation of an Egyptian priestess's costume and go to young Drigg's house to wreak vengeance on him for the sacrilege he had committed when he put the sacerdotal ring on a profane finger."

"Oh, pshaw!" I scoffed. "You really believe that?"

"I do, indeed, my friend. Jobina Houston had a morbid fear of cats, therefore she was doubly sensitive to the influence of the cat-headed goddess. In ancient days that ring

had soaked up influences of the old temples when it adorned the finger of some priest of Bastet or Sechmet; it had lain sealed in resin for a full thousand years and more. Those influences could not be dissipated because of the hermetic sealing of the balsam envelope that held them. Then when they had been released from their integument those forces—those psychic influences with which the ring was saturated—were released from it as water is released from a squeezed sponge. The malefic forces took possession of Jobina like a tangible mephitic vapor. She was helpless under their influence."

"U'm-h'm," I agreed doubtfully. "I've heard of such things, but how was it you managed to arrest their working? When you called to her in Scott Driggs's flat she seemed like a sleep-walker and made no effort to resist when you demanded the ring. How was that?"

"Ah, there I took the chance, my friend. I played the hunch, as you would say. I knew that girl had been brought up religiously. She believed firmly in the power of God—of good. She was like a person in light hypnosis, unable to control herself or her movements, but able to hear outside voices. So I called to her, reminding her of the great power of God—reminded her how He had overcome the heathen world and made a mock of all the pantheon of heathen gods and goddesses. In effect I said to her, 'What are you, a Christian woman, doing when you listen to the blandishments of heathen deities? Don't you know that they are powerless before the might of the Lord God?' A child may dread its shadow, but when its father tells it that the shadow has no substance, *pouf!* that fear is gone. I told her that the forces that enthralled her had no being, that they were but myths and memories—just the shadows of old dreams that vanished in the brightness of the face of God. And so it was. For just a little moment she rebelled against their malign power, and in that moment I took off the ring. Then *paf!* the charm was broken, the spell dissolved, the powerhouse of their influence put out of commission. *Voilà.*"

"What about the ring?" I asked. "Will you give it back to Scott?"

"Of course," he answered, "but only when he promises to give it to some museum. That thing is far too dangerous to be left where unwary young women may slip it on their fingers. Yes."

Dawn came, heralded by an ever-widening crimson glow, as we turned into the driveway. "*Tiens,*" he raised a hand to pat back a great yawn. "I am a tired old man, me. I think I need a tonic before I climb into bed. Yes, certainly; of course."

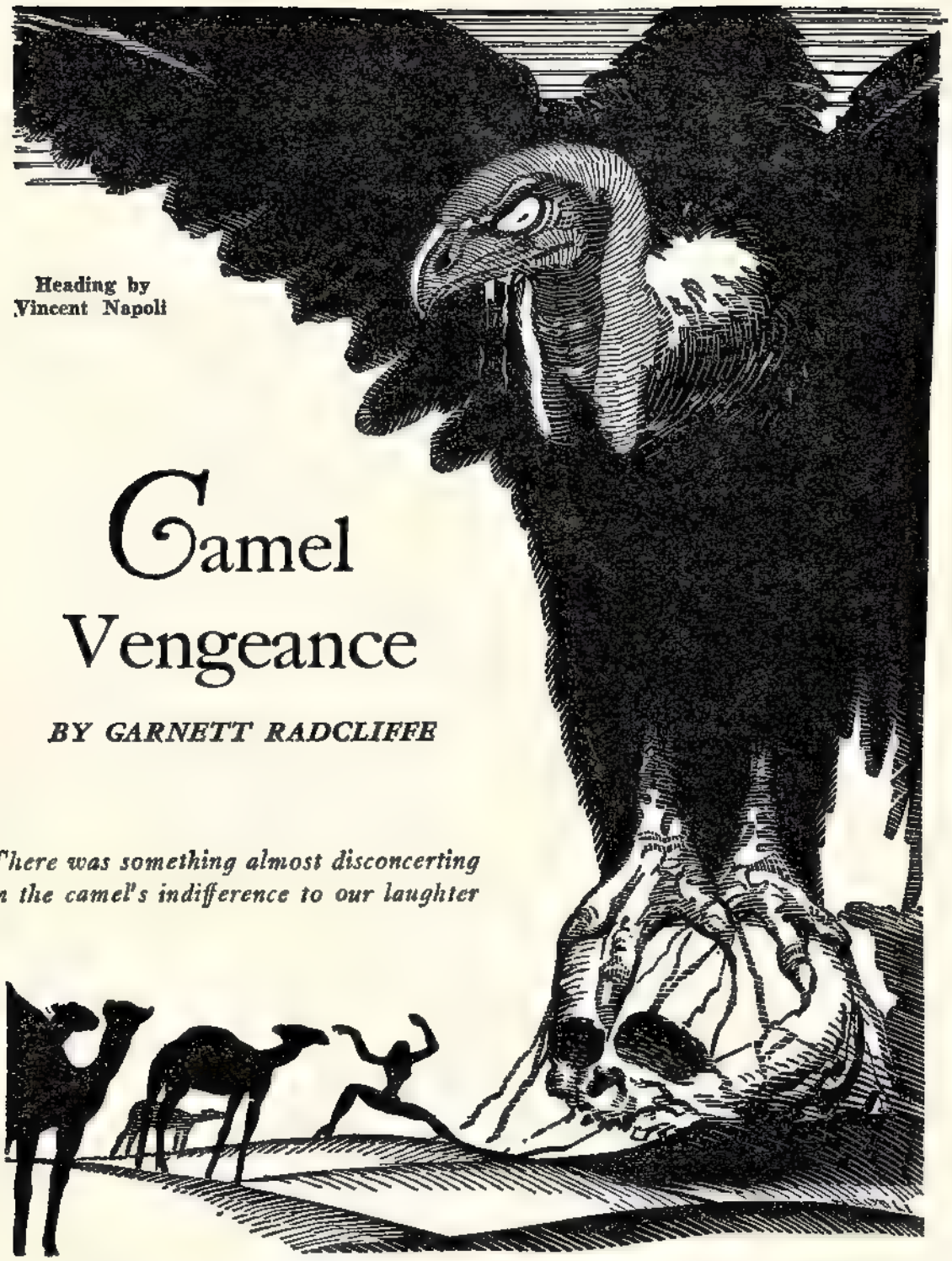
"A tonic?" I echoed.

"But yes. I prescribe him. Four ounces of brandy, the dose to be repeated at five-minute intervals for the next quarter-hour."

Sleepers

By DOROTHY QUICK

OUT of the night what laughter sprayed the air
Cadenced and fell into some timeless void
A vibrant instant, then no longer there?
One sleeper heard it and his sleep destroyed
Awoke in rage, another did not care,
And still another, hearing music gleam
Across the starlight from he knew not where,
Was drunken with the magic of a dream.



Heading by Vincent Napoli

Camel Vengeance

BY GARNETT RADCLIFFE

There was something almost disconcerting in the camel's indifference to our laughter

THIS thing happened in Aden. Aden is an interrogation mark at the foot of the Red Sea, a burning query to which an Arab would tell you that only a camel knows the answer.

Certainly only a camel could give the true explanation of this story. It concerns what happened to Rosemary Anderson, daughter of Tom Anderson of the Protectorate Police, when she visited the Barren Rocks.

We were prepared to welcome her. Tom, who would have made a good publicity agent, had led us to believe that his daughter was a sort of second Ruth Draper, an impersonator and comedienne, and in Aden laughter is as hard to come by as cold beer. I wasn't at the party Tom gave in honor of his daughter at the Union Club, but I got a report from young Howlette of the Sappers who was.

"Topping girl," he told me. "Not exactly what you'd call a beauty, but a good type. Dashed clever too. She did a sketch of an old Lancashire woman buying eggs that made me roar."

Against which I got another report from Bob Faulkner, a sailor who had had the bad luck to get himself spiked on our dun-colored peninsula.

"I can't stand that Anderson girl," he said. "Big hands and feet and laughs too much. Some people think she's funny, but I'm hanged if I do."

Remembering the Latin proverb *"quot homines tot sententiae"* I decided to reserve judgment until I had a chance of seeing the newcomer for myself.

The chance came at a hospital dance at Crater. Rosemary was a big bouncing girl with honey-colored hair and prominent teeth and an assured manner. "Jolly" is the word that describes her best. When I saw her she was being the life and soul of a crowd of lobster-faced subalterns in bush tunics.

"Camels?" I heard her cry, with a not very good imitation of the way people talk in Lancashire. "Nay, luv, ah don' like camels. They look like hearth-rugs or summat stuck on a couple o' clothes props. An', oh my, don' they smell fierce!"

The subalterns laughed, especially young Howlett. I took a gin and tonic to a man who might give me a tip for the next Khormaksar races. And the sudden laughter, loud and prolonged, drew my attention again to Miss Anderson, and after a moment I began to laugh myself.

Something had inspired her to start imitating a camel. As a rule imitations of the sort made me yawn, but she was being really funny.

Evidently she possessed a keener observation and a greater power of mimicry than I'd have given her credit for. And she had been assisted by Nature for giving this particular impersonation in that she had a long neck, prominent teeth and a long loose-jointed body.

Nor did she mind making herself look ridiculous in a good cause. With her back humped and her extended head scything from side to side she galumphed stiff-legged round the room emitting the moaning, grunting sounds suggestive of outraged dignity that was peculiar to the camel.

To make people laugh in Aden is an accomplishment. She succeeded as I'd never known anyone succeed before. We forgot our prickly heat, irritability and depression due to excessive humid heat and laughed and laughed. The band stopped, the dancers came crowding in to watch, and even the most senior and liverish amongst us forgot their dignity and applauded like schoolboys at a pantomime.

She had to do her impromptu act again and again. When duty called me away at one o'clock in the morning my memory was of her showing us how a camel kneels to be loaded; it made me laugh all the way up the Khormaksar road where the salt pans and the windmills which fill them look like frozen Dutch landscapes transplanted to the desert.

That night I had witnessed the birth of a star. But its waxing and steady ascent in the Aden social firmament I was was not privileged to witness since official duty had sent me to Socotra for a spell.

On the island of dragon-blood trees, wild donkeys and semi-starvation there were no camels to remind me of Rosemary. Memory of the evening at the Crater hospital had passed from my mind when an attack of malaria caused me to return sweating, shivering and miserable in an overcrowded Dakota that landed me on the Khormaksar flying field.

A LITTLE later, when I was lying convalescent on the veranda of the new R. A. F. hospital overlooking Post Office bay, Rob Faulkner visited me with grapes

and gossip. Like most naval officers when ashore he is an inveterate gossip.

"Rosemary Anderson's got herself engaged to young Howlett," he told me after other things had been discussed. "Well, she's not exactly my cup of tea, but they seem to suit each other. Anyway, his married life shouldn't be dull. That girl's a genius in her own line. Ever seen her camel impersonations? It's terrific. About the funniest thing that's ever happened in Aden. She goes like this—"

He popped a grape into his mouth, rose from his chair and began to imitate Rosemary imitating a camel. That was my first intimation of how great was her success for he could have employed no sincerer flattery.

While I laughed a passing sister, evidently another Rosemary fan, put down what she was carrying and began to vie with Rob in performing camel antics. Then a couple of walking cases in pajamas joined in. She had started one of those vogues that sometimes attack communities like infectious diseases.

What heightened our amusement was the fact that a string of the genuine article chanced to be passing along the road beneath the veranda. The sister leaned over the balcony like Juliet and made camel noises. Rob said, "Watch out sister, they'll spit in your eye," but his warning was unnecessary. Had we been monkeys mocking from a treetop the great brown brutes could not have ignored us more completely. Heavy and supercilious with lowered eyelids they stalked past us like kings disdainful of the mob. I felt foolish, perhaps we all felt a little foolish after they had passed. There had been something very disconcerting in their indifference to our laughter.

BY THE time I was fit enough to leave hospital Rosemary and her camel turn had become the talk of Aden. Another cause for merriment was that she had developed an ambition to become a camel rider, an ambition the camels themselves seemed determined to thwart. Evidently camels were allergic to her. Her appearance in the camel lines was enough to cause a sort of riot. They squealed and gurgled and refused to kneel and indulged in even more unpleasant tricks when she went near. But Rosemary was not daunted. Indeed, I think she actually enjoyed teasing the ungainly brutes she could mimic so brilliantly.

I witnessed one such episode. It was in the main street of Mauri, the straggling Arab village between Steamer and Crater. On this occasion it almost seemed as if it was the camel that was intent on making Rosemary look ridiculous. It had allowed her to mount pillion behind young Howlett who could ride like a Bedouin, and now in the center of the busiest street in Aden it was "playing up."

It had turned itself broadside to the stream of traffic, thus effectively blocking the street. And in front of an ever increasing audience of natives, bullock carts, goats, taxis and children it was going through a camel's full repertoire of hate. Bellowing and bubbling with its head thrust forward like a snake's it looked like some absurd prehistoric monster exhibiting its helpless riders before the guffawing crowd.

I was in a small van driven by an eighteen-year-old Arab called Hassein Baksh Yaffei. To get past was impossible so we were perforce witnesses to Howlett's humiliation. I say Howlett's because Rosemary didn't seem to care. Not in the least frightened she gurgled back at the furious brute in what she called "camel-ese."

"*Ooh-wah*, nasty. . . . You're a *wah-wah-ooh-wah* great smelly lump of stupidity . . . Pick oop the stoomps, Sam. Hump, an' let's get weavin' . . . Less of the *wah-wah-wah* from you, old fuzzy face!"

The camel's reply was a sudden lurch that deposited them both on the road. It wheeled then, but its obvious intention of savaging Rosemary was forestalled by an *askarri* of the Levies who grabbed its nose cord just in time.

I took them to the club that was their destination in the van. On the way both Howlett and myself tried to scold Rosemary. Camels, we warned her, were more intelligent than they appeared and vindictive brutes with long memories. She would be well-advised, we told her, to leave them alone.

She laughed at us.

"Great gawky daddy-long-legs," she scoffed. "I'm going to ride one before I leave Aden or die."

I think that episode in Mauri rankled. A few days later she made what was to be her last public appearance as a camel impersonator in the Khormaksar open-air cinema. It was a spiteful performance and extraordinarily funny. The evening was a riot. We held our sides when she lolloped round the stage after the fashion of a hobbled camel. Like a great cartoonist she must have made a careful study of her subject for there was not a trick or mannerism nor an inflection of a grunt that was not included in her repertoire.

At last she was too exhausted to continue. I observed her when she was making her final bow. She'd already become Adenised in that she had gone thinner and had patches of prickly heat on her face and arms. She looked strung-up and nervy and there was almost feverish glitter of excitement in her eyes.

"Ooh-wah! . . . Oooh-wah!" It might have been a camel that bubbled at us across the footlights. "I'm off to feed my hump, so *oooh-wah-ooh!"*

The thing was infectious. We yelled back *"ooh-wah-ooh!"* so that the cinema sounded like the camel-lines sound when the syces are bringing round the feed.

I THINK Rosemary's success plus the Aden climate must have unbalanced her a little. Perhaps she had camels on the brain. For a few evenings later she rode alone on her pony to the tents of the Bedouin Legion above Sheikh Othman and sought out the head syce who was in charge of the racing camels loaned to the Legion by the Sultan of Rdiyan.

Although the syce swears otherwise I suspect money changed hands. However it was, Rosemary got her wish. He brought out Shaitan whom the Arabs called *"Gamel El Awal"* (Camel No. 1). He was a vast brute with a coat like dirty cream and a face like an Assyrian King.

Shaitan was old and well-trained. Unlike her previous mounts he made no protest when he saw Rosemary. On the evidence of the syce he knelt as meekly as an ass for her to mount.

When she was in the saddle the syce told Shaitan to rise and led him by the nose cord on to the Maidan beyond the wire.

Three times the syce led him in a circle. Then he ran so that Shaitan had to trot. Rosemary was enchanted. She tapped Shaitan on the neck with her switch and called him some silly name.

At the sound Shaitan seemed suddenly to go mad. He screamed and jerked the cord from the unsuspecting hands of the syce. Next instant the great bactrian shot off like a thunderbolt, galloping at devastating speed across the boulder-strewn maidan. With extended neck and open mouth he must have looked like some horrific dragon bearing away its victim.

The syce heard her scream as if, to quote his own words, she had glimpsed the Gates of Hell. He shouted to her to fling herself off, but either she didn't understand or was too frightened. And then the monstrous, striding apparition had vanished in the wilderness of scrub and sand dunes.

There was consternation when the news reached Steamer. I saw Tom Anderson in the Union Club looking as white as paper.

"We must find her as soon as possible," he said. "And you fellows must help."

Of course we were all game. There are roving Bedouin in the country above Aden who would cut your throat for sixpence. Had she been thrown she might have sustained concussion or a broken leg. Again, the camel might have savaged her.

There was a wide area to search. My local knowledge suggested that Shaitan might have headed for the maidan bordering the Le Kij road when he would find pasture and roving females of his own species. I went in that direction in the Hillman van, and as usual Hassein Baksh Yaffei was my driver.

Young Howlett had had the same idea. He'd gone on foot taking with him a fox terrier called Neb he himself had given to Rosemary. But Neb had failed to pick up any scent and Howlett was looking white

and drawn with fatigue for he'd been running when I encountered him.

"Ten to one she's walking back this minute," I said to comfort him. "Hop in at the back and we'll see if we can meet her."

Our search of the particular stretch of maidan proved fruitless. Beyond were hills too rugged for even a camel so we returned to the Sheikh Othman road.

Here we halted to take further counsel. While we stood there arguing night swooped on Aden like a raven. Neb struggled and whined in Howlett's arms. The harbor lights far below suddenly shone forth and the broad red forehead of the moon peeped above Sham-Sham's right shoulder.

The temperature had dropped at least four degrees. By chance we had stopped close to the Legion camel lines and we could hear them moaning and snarling in the darkness. Hassein Baksh cocked his ear to the sound and looked puzzled.

"The camels are upset tonight," he said. "Hearken to them, sahib! Maybe they are missing Shaitan!"

Even to my experienced ear the camels seemed unusually loquacious for that hour. The voices reminded me of Rosemary, and I think they did Howlett too. He spoke rather desperately:

"She's scared of the dark. . . . She's scared of a lot of things in Aden. . . . Oh, damn those camels!"

We drove up through the flaring Sheikh Othman bazaar, past the barrier and so to the Le Hej caravan route which points itself to the heart of Saudi Arabia. Other search parties had also headed that way. People were shouting at intervals and firing off Very lights as they worked like beaters across the plain in the direction of Wadi Kebir.

If she were on that side of the road they'd be safe to find her. We turned right where the sand was firm enough to bear our tires and bumped slowly across the maidan, the headlamps showing us boulders and clumps of shrub. At last we glimpsed the lights of a Somali village and heard a distant barking of dogs.

Shaitan would have been unlikely to have gone near the village. We circled away and as we did so a flock of riderless camels passed like fantastic shadows in the moonlight and vanished behind a sand dune. Without orders Hassein stopped the truck.

I got out and Howlett joined me. Hassein spoke from his place at the wheel, and his voice told me he was frightened.

"We had better return to the road, sahib. This is an evil spot haunted by the ghosts of camels. Does the sahib not perceive anything?"

The sahib did—both sahibs did. A faint but horribly distinct scent of carrion had reached us. And I realized then exactly where we were. Curiosity on my first arrival in Aden had caused me to visit the place before.

Somewhere in front of us, in a depression hidden among the sand-dunes, was the local madafin eg gemel or camel cemetery, a horrible place where vultures and kites gorged on the unburied carcasses and pariahs had tugs of war for grisly spoils.

SUDDENLY the fox terrier wriggled out of Howlett's grasp and began running. Deaf to our shouts he made a cast on the direction of the madafin, then he set his nose to the ground and started running on what was evidently a trail. There was nothing to be done save to follow. We returned to the truck and drove slowly behind what Hassein called the "little unclean one" as he sniffed and whined among the stones and shrubs.

Then the sand grew darker, the stench increased and I knew we were entering the madafin. Our lamps showed us the clean-picked skeletons of camels, their extended necks looking like the vertebrae of weird fish. A pariah with something in its mouth fled from our lights, and great vultures like ghoulish sentries roosted among the rocks.

Hassein gave a cry. On the sand dunes, silhouetted like black rocks against the stars, there were camels. The Arab pointed and his voice was a moan of fear.

"Behold Shaitan himself and his friends! What are they watching? Allah be merciful! Allah guard us from this evil. . . ."

Then Howlett shouted something and leapt from the truck. A huge vulture was

weaving its uncouth dance before the motionless camels. It was flopping and hopping in circles on the bone-littered sand. Then I too yelled and sprang from the truck.

What we saw was no vulture. Rosemary in her white shirt and jodphurs was dancing and hopping among the carrion. The mimicry of a vulture was horribly exact. She uttered croaking sounds as she hopped and flapped her arms.

For an instant we were too horrified to approach. But Rosemary had a champion who knew no fear. It was Neb who dashed in fury at the camels. At his furious barking the evil spell was broken. They wheeled and fled like ungainly ghosts with the little dog raging at their heels. . . .

Rosemary paid us no attention. She was deathly white, her eyes were staring and expressionless and her mouth down-drawn in a terrible parody of a smile. She wished to go on dancing. When we took her arms and tried to lead her to the truck she waved her arms like wings and made motions with her head as if she were trying to pick our hands.

"Concussion," I told Howlett who looked as if he might faint. "Shaitan threw her and the shock has sent her a bit silly. . . . All right Rosemary . . . take it easy old girl."

She fought us like the vulture she imagined herself to be. And as we struggled I seemed to hear a devilish sound as if camels were laughing in the darkness.

THOSE are the facts. You can draw from them any inference you choose. The inner truth of the matter will never be known until God has unveiled the mystery of the relationship between man and the animal creation.

Anyway, Rosemary is now fully recovered and is living happily in England with young Howlett as her husband. The doctors claim it was their electric shock treatment restored her sanity, but I think most of the credit should go to Neb who never left her by day or night. For though you may query the possibility of camels possessing a malign influence, you cannot gainsay that the love of a dog may raise a stricken human soul upwards from the pit.

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Heading by Fred Humiston

The Metamorphosis of Earth

BY CLARK ASHTON SMITH

IN THE year 2197, the first intimation of a strange peril of world-wide scope and gravity came and passed unrecognized for what it really was in the form of a newspaper dispatch from the Sahara, reporting a sand-storm of unprecedented fury. Several oases, according to the report, had been entirely blotted out, and a number of caravans had been lost in the sweep of the tremendous storm, which had towered to a height of twelve thousand feet and had covered many hundred square miles. No one caught in it had come out alive nor had any trace of the missing caravans been found. Subsequent dispatches brought the news that the affected region was full of minor upheavals for weeks after the cessation of the main disturbance, and that a furore of superstitious fear had been excited among the desert tribes, who believed that the end of the world was now imminent. But, in the surge and press of more sensational and apparently more important items then engaging the world's attention, no one, not even the most advanced and alert men of science, gave more than a passing thought to the sand-storm.

Toward the end of the same year, there came a fresh report from the Sahara, this time of so strange and inexplicable a nature that it immediately aroused the curiosity of many scientists, who forthwith formed an expedition to investigate the conditions that had given rise to the report. The members of a caravan from Timbuctoo, the first to venture into the path of the great storm, had returned within a week, half-mad with terror and telling incoherently of

unaccountable changes that had taken place all through the disturbed area. They said that the long, rolling dunes of sand had all disappeared, to be replaced by solid earth and mineral forms such as no one had ever seen before. The earth consisted of great patches of a sort of violet-colored clay, very moist, and with a noxious odor that had almost overpowered those who ventured to walk upon it.

Also, there were outcroppings, immense ledges, and even hills of singular stone and metals. The stone was mainly crystallized, with red, black, blue and dark-green colors, and the metals were white and iridescent. The members of the caravan swore that they had seen huge boulders heave visibly from the earth before their eyes, and had watched the crystals swell on the sides of these boulders. Over all the changed area, they said, there were vapors that arose continually, forming a dense canopy of cloud that shut out the sun. But, in spite of this fact, the heat was more intense than any they had ever known, and had an intolerably humid character. Another odd thing they had noticed was, that the sand immediately contiguous to this area had become so fine and pulverous that it soared in high clouds at every step of their camels, who had almost been engulfed in it. They all believed implicitly that Iblees, the Mohammedan Satan, had come to establish his kingdom on earth, and, as a preparatory measure, was creating for himself and his subject demons a suitable soil and atmosphere resembling those of the infernal realms. Henceforth, the region was utterly shunned, till the arrival of the investigating scientists, headed by Roger Lapham, the most renowned American geologist of the period.

II

LAPHAM and his party, in which were several celebrated chemists as well as some fellow-geologists, had chartered two airplanes, and the trip to Timbuctoo, where they paused to interview personally the members of the returned caravan, was a matter of only a few hours.

A new and unexpected angle was added to the strange story, when the scientists learned that eight of the twelve natives whom they desired to see had fallen dangerously ill in the interim since the sending of the last news dispatch. So far, no one had been able to diagnose their illness, which presented a combination of symptoms no less inexplicable than unfamiliar. These symptoms were quite varied, and differed somewhat in the individual cases, though acute respiratory and mental disorders were common to all. Several of the men had shown a violent homicidal mania which they were already too weak and ill to carry to the point of action; others had tried to commit suicide in a sudden and delirious excess of melancholia and nervous terror; and six of the eight were afflicted with peculiar cutaneous disturbances which would have suggested leprosy if it had not been that the diseased portions, which developed and increased with remarkable rapidity, were of a bright green color instead of being white, and had purplish borders. The pulmonary symptoms were not dissimilar to those experienced by men who have inhaled some sort of deadly gas, and were marked by a swift eating-away of the tissues. Two of the men died on the evening of the same day that Lapham and his companions arrived in Timbuctoo, and by noon of the following day the four who had been so far exempt were stricken down. They suffered all the symptoms presented by their fellows, with the addition, even during the earlier stages, of a form of locomotor ataxia and a queer disorder of vision which constituted an inability to see plainly in broad daylight, though their sight was normal at other times. They, as well as most of the others, now developed a terrible condition of necrosis involving the whole bony structure of the body, and within two days all were dead.

Lapham and his brother-scientists talked with these men and did what little could be done to palliate their agonies. No more could be learned, however, than the news-dispatches had already proffered in the way of information, apart from the fact that the caravan-members all attributed their illness to contact with the uncanny clay and min-

erals on which they had come in the heart of the Sahara. Those who had ventured the furthest into the strange area had been the first to develop this illness.

It became evident to the scientists that their proposed explorations might be accompanied by grave bodily dangers. One of the planes was immediately sent to England for a supply of gas masks, oxygen, and complete suits of an insulative material designed to protect against everything then known to science in the form of harmful radio-activity.

As soon as the planes returned, bringing the requisite supplies, the journey into the Sahara was resumed. Following at an altitude of one thousand feet the northern caravan route toward Insalah and Ghadames, the scientists soon began to penetrate the Juf desert, amid whose golden-yellow dunes the affected area was said to lie.

AN ODD spectacle now presented itself to them. Far-off on the horizon was a low-lying mass of clouds or vapors—a thing almost without precedent in that dry, rainless region. These clouds or vapors were of a pearly-gray color, and they covered not only hundreds of leagues of the rolling sand, or what had once been sand, but also seemed to encroach upon the rocky, weather-worn terrain to east of the Juf. Nothing could be seen of the geological changes that had taken place, till the airplanes had approached within a few miles of the vapor-mass. Then the exploring party had a glimpse of the vari-colored soil and minerals described by the natives, now dimly discernible through the writhing fumes that still arose from them.

Before landing, the scientists flew slowly above the vapors to determine their extent and density. They found that the mass was circular in form and was at least a hundred miles in diameter. It constituted a level and uniform floor, dazzlingly bright in the sunshine, and with no breaks or variations anywhere.

After crossing and circumnavigating the whole cloud-mass, a landing was made near the southern verge, and the expedition proceeded to encamp. The day was still new, since they had made an early start; and Lapham and the others were eager to begin their investigations without delay. Putting on their insulative suits and equipping themselves with the gas-masks and oxygen-tanks, the whole party set out forthwith.

They had not gone far when they encountered the fine sand or dust of which the caravan-members had spoken. They sank to the waist in this sand at every step, but its inconceivable lightness made their progress not so difficult as it would normally have been. At every footfall, at every touch or movement, the fine powder soared in a huge cloud, which, as they had occasion to observe, took hours to settle itself again. None of them had ever seen such dust before, and the chemists in the party could scarcely wait to analyze it.

At last, after much wandering and floundering in the dust-cloud, through which they could see nothing, Lapham and his companions drew themselves out on a margin of the strange violet soil. The contrast of this wet, steaming clay with the gulfs of atom-like powder that surrounded it was so inexplicable, so utterly amazing as to baffle and dumbfound all conjecture. The substance was unearthly in its bizarreness, and the heat that emanated from it was almost beyond endurance. The scientists had sweltered in their heavy air-tight suits while crossing the zone of dust, but now they were subjected to actual suffering.

At every step their astonishment grew, for the dim landscape beneath the vapors was such as no human eye had ever seen before. Gigantic ledges of crystallized rock-forms arose in the foreground, and about the crystals there was something, even apart from their curious black, blue, red and dark-green coloration, which served to differentiate them from anything classified by geologists. They were prodigious in size, and had innumerable facets and a look of geometrical complexity foreign to all normal rocks. There was a sinister vitality in their aspect, too, and the tale of the natives, who purported to have seen them grow and swell, became almost comprehensible. Somehow, they resembled living organisms as much as minerals. Everywhere, also, were

outcroppings of the white and iridescent metals that had been described.

As the party advanced, the ledges grew larger, and towered overhead in cliffs and precipices and crags, among which the explorers found a tortuous, winding way. The crags were horned and beetling, and weird beyond imagination. It was like a scene in some other world; and nothing to which the scientists came in the course of their wanderings was in any manner suggestive of the familiar Terra Firma.

After groping their way through narrow rifts and along the rim of fantastic scarps where all foothold was precarious, they emerged from amid the crags, on the shelving shore of a lake of blackish-green water, whose full extent was indeterminate. Lapham, who was ahead of the others, half-lost in the coils of the rising vapors, cried out suddenly, and when his companions overtook him, they found him stooping above a queer plant with an etiolated fungus-like stalk and broad, serrate leaves of a carnal crimson, mottled with gray blotches. Around it, the pinkish tips of younger plants were protruding from the soil, and they seemed to wax visibly beneath the astounded gaze of the explorers.

"What on earth is it?" cried Lapham.

"As far as I can see, it isn't anything that could legitimately exist on earth," rejoined Sylvester, one of the chemists, who had made a side-line of botany. They all gathered about the queer plant and examined it minutely. The leaves and stalks were extremely fibrous in their texture and were full of deep pores like those of coral. But when Lapham tried to break off a portion, it proved to be very tough and rubbery, and the use of a knife was necessitated before the branch could be severed. The plant writhed and twisted like a living creature at the touch of the knife, and when the operation was finally accomplished, a juice that bore a startling resemblance to blood in its color and consistency, began to exude slowly. The severed section was placed in a knapsack for future analysis.

Now the scientists proceeded toward the margin of the lake. Here they found some plant-growths of a different type, suggesting calamites, or giant reeds. These plants were twenty feet tall and were divided into a dozen segments with heavy, swollen-looking joints. They had no leaves, and their hues varied from a leaden purple to a leprous white with green shadowings and veinings. Although there was no wind, all of them were swaying a little, with a sound like the hissing of serpents. As Lapham and his confreres came closer, they saw that the reeds were covered with lip-like formations that recalled the suckers of an octopus.

Sylvester was now in advance of the others. As he neared the foremost plant, the thing swayed suddenly forward with all the suppleness and celerity of a python and encircled the chemist in a series of constricting coils. Sylvester screamed in terror as the coils tightened about him, and the others ran instantly to his aid, though dumbfounded and well-nigh stupefied by the strangeness of the happening. Several of them carried clasp-knives, and these were at once requisitioned in effecting his release. Lapham and two of the chemists began to hack and saw at the horrible coils, while the reed continued its constriction about the limbs and body of the helpless man.

The plant was amazingly tough and resistant, and Lapham's knife-blade broke before he had sawed half through the section upon which he was engaged. His companions, however, were more successful, and at length the diabolical growth was severed in two places, one of which was not far from the root. But the coils still clung around their victim, who had gone suddenly pale and limp, and who now fell in a dead faint as his companions finished their task. It was found that some of the sucker-like formations had penetrated his insulative suit and were actually embedded in his flesh. Slowly, in squirming segments, the coils were cut away; but nothing could be done at present with the suckers, for want of the proper surgical instruments; and it was obviously imperative that Sylvester should be taken back to camp as quickly as possible.

Carrying the still unconscious man among them by turns, the explorers retraced their steps amid the crags and ledges of many-colored crystals, along the perilous rim

of steaming cliffs and gulfs, and found their way through the zone of atomic dust, till they re-emerged, altogether exhausted and frightfully shaken, on the shore of the natural desert. In spite of their urgent haste, however, they took with them some specimens of the crystals, of the white and iridescent metals and the violet soil, as well as parts of the python-like reed, for future examination; and they greatly deplored their inability to secure also some of the water in the blackish-green lake. After the chemist's experience, no one would have dared to venture among the fringing reeds along its shore.

Sylvester required immediate attention, for he was white and bloodless as a vampire's victim, and his pulse-beats were very slow and so feeble as to be almost undetectible. His clothing was removed and he was stretched on an improvised operating-table. It was now seen that the portions of his limbs and trunk in which the suckers had implanted themselves were horribly swollen and discolored; and this swelling rendered the task of removal all the more difficult. There was nothing to do but cut the suckers out; and after the administration of an opiate, which seemed scarcely needful under the circumstances, the operation was performed by Dr. Adams, the physician of the party. It was evident that Sylvester had been dreadfully poisoned by the suckers, for even after their removal, the flesh in which they had sunk continued to swell, and soon turned to a putrescent black which threatened to involve his whole body. At no time did he recover full consciousness, though during the night after the explorers' return, he began to toss and mutter weakly in a sort of low delirium, which presently merged into a coma from which he did not awaken. At ten the next morning, Dr. Adams announced that Sylvester was dead. It was necessary to inter him at once, for his body presented the appearance and all the usual characteristics of a week-old corpse.

A SENSE of ominous gloom and oppression was thrown over the whole party by the chemist's fate, but it was of course felt that nothing should be permitted to delay, or interfere with, the work of investigation that had been undertaken. No sooner had the unfortunate Sylvester been laid to rest in a hurried grave amid the Saharan sands, when his fellow-scientists began eagerly their examination of the specimens they had secured. These were all studied under powerful microscopes and were subjected to chemical analysis of the most searching and rigorous order. Many known constituents were found, but all of these were immingled with elements for which chemistry had no names. The molecular formation of the crystals was more intricate than that of any substance known on earth; and the metals were heavier than anything so far discovered. The cellular composition of the two plant-forms was oddly similar to that of animal bodies, and it was readily ascertained that they were intermediate between the animal and vegetable kingdoms, partaking of the character of both. How such minerals and plants could have appeared suddenly, in a location so obviously impossible even for the fostering of normal forms, was a theme of endless argument and inconclusive surmise between Lapham and his confreres. For awhile, no one could propound a theory that seemed at all plausible or credible. Apart from every thing else, they were puzzled by the zone of fine dust about the changed area: this zone was found to consist of sand-particles whose very molecules had been partially broken up and disintegrated.

"It looks," said Lapham, "as if someone or something had blown up all the atoms in this part of the Sahara, and had then started a totally new process of re-integration and evolution, with the development of soil, water, minerals, atmosphere and plants such as could never have existed on the earth during any of its geological epochs."

This startling theory was discussed pro and con, and was finally adopted as the only explanation that contained elements of possibility. But it remained to determine the agency of the geological and evolutionary changes; and of course no one could propound anything decisive as to the nature of this agency. The whole thing was enough

to stagger the imagination of a Jules Verne; and with scientists of such indubitable rectitude as Lapham and his fellows, the fantasies of lawless imagination had no place. They were concerned only with things that could be verified and proven according to natural laws.

SEVERAL days were devoted to analyzing, re-analyzing and theorizing. Then a report of the conditions that had been found was drawn up, and it was decided to send a summary of this report by radio to Europe and America. An attempt to use the radios carried by the party revealed a peculiar condition of absolute static that prevailed above the vapor-covered region. No messages could be sent or received across this region, though communication was readily established with points that were not in a direct line with the new area, such as Rome, Cairo, Petrograd, Havana and New Orleans. This condition of static was permanent—at least, many repeated efforts, at all hours of the day and night, were utterly ineffectual. One of the planes, carrying a radio-apparatus, soared to a height of nine thousand feet above the encampment, and sought to establish the desired connection, but in vain. It was necessary for the plane to cross the whole cloud-mass, to the northern side, before New York and London could receive and return its messages.

"It would seem," observed Lapham, "as if some sort of ultra-powerful ray, that prevents the passage of radio vibrations, had been turned on this part of the Sahara. Evidently there is a screen of interfering force."

While arguments as to the validity of this theory, the nature and origin of the conjectural rays, and their possible relation to the geologic changes, were still in progress, two members of the party complained of feeling ill. Both of them, on examination by Dr. Adams, were discovered to be afflicted with cutaneous symptoms resembling those that had been developed by many of the caravan from Timbuctoo. The characteristic patches of bright green, with purplish borders, were spreading rapidly on their arms and shoulders, and soon invaded the exposed portions of the skin. The two men became mildly delirious within a few hours, and gave evidence of extreme nervous depression. Simultaneously with this turn of their illness, Dr. Adams himself grew conscious of a sudden feeling of indisposition. Obviously, the insulative clothing worn by the explorers had been inadequate for their protection against whatever lethal forces were inherent in the new soil, minerals and vapor-laden atmosphere. It was decided that the party must return to civilization immediately, before others should be stricken.

Camp was broken up, and the two planes were headed for Great Britain. During the brief journey, all of the scientists began to fall ill, and the pilot of one of the planes, collapsed, allowing the controlless air-vessel to plunge into the Atlantic near the coast of Spain. The crew of the second plane, seeing the accident, flew gallantly to the rescue, and succeeded in saving Lapham and Dr. Adams, who were struggling in the waters. Their companions, including the sick pilot, were all drowned. It was a sad remnant of the expedition which landed at London.

III

IN THE meanwhile, the summary of the explorers' report, dispatched with so much difficulty by radio, had been published in all the leading dailies of the world and had aroused universal interest amid the scientific fraternity. The press was full of theories and conjectures, some of them extremely wild and fantastic. One journal went so far as to insinuate that the Saharan manifestations were part of a plan for world-dominion that was being put into practice by the United Oriental Federation, which then included China, Indo-China, Burma, and Japan; and others were inclined to name Russia as the instigator.

On the very same day when Lapham and his companions reached London, there came from the United States the news of a terrible and mysterious cataclysm, which had occurred in Missouri and which had involved at least half of this state. Though the time was still mid-winter and the ground was covered with unmelting snow, a tremendous storm of dust had appeared, in

which many towns and cities, including St. Louis, had been utterly swallowed up. All communication with these towns and cities had been cut off, and no message, no living thing nor evidence of life, had come forth from the storm. There were great billowing clouds, that soared to a stupendous height, and from which emerged a sound like the rumbling of thunder, or the explosion of unaccountable tons of dynamite. The dust, of unbelievable fineness, settled upon many miles of the adjacent areas, and nothing could be done or determined for days, since all who dared to approach the raging storm were instantly lost and never returned. The terror and mystery of a cataclysm so unparalleled, so far beyond all explanation or imagination, fell like a black pall upon the United States and horrified the whoe civilized world. The dust from the storm, which was analyzed at once, was found to consist of partially disintegrated molecules; and it required no great reach of fantasy for scientists, reporters and the general public to associate the upheaval with the Saharan sand-storm that had given birth to a terrain of unearthly strangeness.

The news was brought to Lapham and his fellows in the hospital to which they had been taken from the plane. Several of the party were already too ill to comprehend intelligently what had taken place; but Lapham and Dr. Adams, both of whom were less severely stricken than the others, were at once prepared to comment on the report from America.

"I believe," said Lapham, "that some cosmic process has been instituted which may threaten the integrity and even the continued existence of our world—at least, of any world which we could call ours, and in which human beings could dwell and survive. I predict that within a few weeks, geological and atmospheric conditions similar to those which we found in the Sahara will also prevail in Missouri."

This prophetic utterance, made to reporters from the *Times* and the *Daily Mail*, received considerable publicity and added to the world-wide consternation and terror that was being felt.

While dispatches announcing the continuation of the atomic storm were still agitating five continents, several of the returned explorers died from the unknown malady by which they had been seized. Their cases were characterized by nearly all the symptoms that had been noted in the members of the unfortunate caravan from Timbuctoo, but lacked the pulmonary disorders, from which, it was evident, the use of oxygen-tanks had saved the expedition. Extreme weakness, melancholia, the green, leprous patches, locomotor ataxia, partial blindness and the final necrosis of the bones were all present, and little could be done to mitigate them by any of the attendant doctors, among whom were the most renowned specialists of Great Britain, France, and America. Lapham and Dr. Adams were the only members of the party who survived, and neither of them was ever wholly well at any future time. Till the end of their days, both men suffered from more or less mental depression and from recurrent outbreaks of the cutaneous symptoms.

An odd aftermath of the whole affair was, that similar maladies were contracted in a milder degree by many scientists who examined the mineral and vegetable specimens that had been carefully brought back from Africa by the expedition. No one could isolate or identify the properties that gave rise to such disorders; but it was assumed that rays belonging to the ultra-violet or infra-red ranges, and more powerful than anything hitherto discovered, were being given off by the odd substances. These rays, it was all too evident, were deleterious to human health and life.

While Lapham and Dr. Adams were still lying in hospital, fresh news-items continued to come from America. One of these items was, that two planes, driven by world-famous aviators, had tried to surmount the terrific dust-storm that still raged in Missouri. The storm, like its Saharan fellow, was about twelve thousand feet in height, and it was not thought that any difficulty would be encountered in crossing it at a sufficient altitude. Also, it was believed that some valuable data might be gathered thereby. The planes flew to an elevation of thirteen thousand before approaching the

borders of the storm, but on passing above the rim of the involved area, they were both seen to disappear suddenly in mid-air by people who were watching their flight with field glasses. Neither of the planes ever returned to earth, nor could any sign of them be located.

"Fools!" cried Lapham, when he heard the news of their disappearance. "Of course, when they invaded the vertical area of the storm, they were exposed to the same disintegrative influences that are operating on the earth below. These influences, as I surmised, are coming from outer space. The planes and their aviators have been dissolved into sub-molecular dust."

NO MORE attempts were made to cross the storm, and a widespread exodus of people from the adjacent regions, which had been going on ever since the initial cataclysm, became almost universal in the next few days. Hardly anyone remained, with the exception of a few redoubtable scientists, who wished to be on the ground for purposes of investigation when the upheaval should subside.

Within a week, the storm began to lessen in height and fury, and the clouds became broken and less dense. But, as in the case of the African disturbance, there were minor agitations and upswirlings for another week or more. Then it was perceived that masses of vapor were replacing the dust; and a solid canopy of pearly-gray cloud was soon formed above the whole region. All around this region, the winter snows were buried beneath a mile-wide zone of the sub-molecular powder.

In spite of the awful fate that had befallen the Timbuctoo caravan and the geological expedition, there were several scientists brave enough to venture within the St. Louis area when the rising vapors gave proof that the processes of disintegration were at an end. They found the same exotic soil, the same minerals, metals and water that had been discovered in the heart of the Juf desert; but the alien plant-forms had not yet begun to appear. Some of the water was secured for analysis: apart from the usual constituents of water, it was found to contain an element oddly similar to a certain synthetic gas, more lethal than anything hitherto devised, which had lately been invented for use in warfare. This element, however, was not decomposable into the separate elements from which its analogue had been formed by American chemists. Still another gaseous component was isolated, but could not be identified or allied with anything familiar to chemistry. Scarcely had the analysis been completed and its results given to the world, when the chemists who had undertaken the analysis, and also the investigators who had obtained the water, were all stricken down with an illness which differed in certain ways from the one that had been undergone by their Saharan predecessors. All the usual symptoms were presented; and co-incidentally there was a falling-out of all the hair on the heads, faces, limbs and bodies of those afflicted, till not even the finest down remained. Then the places where the hair had been were covered rapidly with a gray formation resembling mould. The formation, on being analyzed, was proven to consist of minute vegetable organisms which increased with remarkable fecundity and soon began to eat the skin and flesh beneath. No antiseptic could combat the ravages of the gray mould, and the victims died in atrocious agony within a few hours. It was surmised that the water must have given rise to these new symptoms, by some process of infection; but how the infection could have occurred was a mystery, since all manner of possible precautions had been taken in handling the water.

A little before the death of these hardy investigators, two singular astronomical discoveries were made. Lapham's theory that rays of an ultra-powerful type were being turned upon the earth from some ulterior source, had led to an intensive study of the neighboring planets, particularly of Mars and Venus, through the new telescopes with three hundred-inch reflectors, with which observatories in Colorado and the Spanish Pyrenees had been equipped. It was thought that the rays might be emanating from one of the planets. Mars, by this time, was definitely known to be inhabited, but little had

been yet learned about Venus, on account of the cloudy envelope with which that world is surrounded. Now, under the close continual scrutiny to which it was subjected, three flashes of white light, occurring at intervals of seventy minutes and lasting for about ninety seconds, were seen to pierce the cloudy envelope, in a region not far from the equator of Venus. The three flashes emanated from the same spot. A little later during the same night, Dr. Malkin of the Colorado observatory, though all his interest was still centered upon the orb of Venus, now almost at meridian, was forced to observe within his field of vision a tiny satellite or asteroid which was apparently following the revolution of the earth. Observations were made, leading to the sensational discovery that this new satellite was no more than a thousand miles distant, and was paralleling the movement of the earth in a position exactly above the state of Missouri! Calculations revealed that it was about two hundred feet in diameter.

Dr. Malkin's two discoveries were announced to the world, and were followed the next day by a report from the Pyrenean observatory, telling of another tiny body that had been located far in the south, directly above the vapor-shrouded region in northern Africa. In size, movement and distance from the earth, this body was similar to the American satellite. The two announcements were the cause of much public excitement, and many conjectures were made as to the origin and character of the two minute bodies, whose very positions made it natural for everyone to connect them at once with the geological phenomena in the subjacent areas. It remained, however, for Roger Lapham to predict that the three flashes on Venus, observed by Dr. Malkin on the same night as his discovery of the first body would soon be followed by the appearance of three new satellites, and also by three more storms of dust in different parts of the world.

"I believe," said Lapham, "that the satellites are mechanical spheres that have been discharged from Venus, and that they contain living beings and also apparatus for the creation and use of the destructive and re-compositive rays that have brought about the singular manifestations in Africa and America. The flashes that Dr. Malkin saw were doubtless caused by the discharge of new spheres. And if Venus had been under continual observation by the new telescopes, two earlier flashes would have been seen, one preceding the atomic storm in Africa and the other the storm in America. I am at a loss to understand, however, why the two spheres were not observed long ago, since it is probable that they have been within telescopic range ever since the onset of the atomic storms."

IV

THERE was a great division of opinion among scientists, as well as among the general public, concerning the validity of Lapham's theory on the origin of the satellites; but no one felt any doubt regarding their problematic relation to the dust-storms and the new terrains. It was perceived that the two orbs were different in color, the African orb inclining to a ruddy tint and the American to a bluish tone. But suddenly, under Dr. Malkin's observation, two nights after the initial discovery, this latter orb took on the reddish hue of its African fellow. Lapham, on hearing of this, went so far as to venture a surmise that the changing colors of the sphere had some connection with the nature of the rays that were being emitted, and that probably the bluish color was associated with a ray promoting the integration of mineral forms, and the reddish with one that had relation to the development of vegetable life.

"What I think is," he went on, "that the people of Venus are trying to establish in certain parts of our world the geological, botanical and meteorological conditions that prevail in their own. The establishment of such conditions is no doubt preliminary to an attempt at invasion. The Venusians, it is likely, could no more exist under the conditions that are favorable to us, than we could under theirs. Therefore, before coming to earth, they must create for themselves a suitable environment in which their colonies can land. Certainly, the hot, steaming

soil and vaporous atmosphere, found in the Sahara and in Missouri, are similar to those that characterize the planet Venus."

Though some were still incredulous, or unable to realize imaginatively what was taking place, a wave of terror inundated the world at the promulgation of this surmise. Hence-forward, the cool theorizing of Lapham and other scientists went on side by side with outbursts of frantic fear and of old-time religious hysteria on the part of the multitude. No one could know when and where the weird, extra-planetary menace would strike next, nor the possible scope of its operations; and the dread anticipation of this menace became a demoralizing and paralyzing force that affected more or less the field of nearly all human activities. The men of science, the astronomers, the chemists, the physicists, the inventors, the electricians, the medical brotherhood, were the only classes of society who, as a whole, went about their usual work with a quickening rather than a slackening of their faculties. Researches were rapidly begun in laboratories all over the world, to find medical agents that would be efficacious in fighting the new diseases caused by contact with the Venusian minerals, air, water and vegetable forms; and in spite of the certain danger, many excursions were made into the vapor-hidden terrains to procure the needful substances for study in the various laboratories. The tale of resultant death and suffering was long and sad, and testified to the undauntable heroism of human scientists. Also, a number of inventors, who had long sought the secret of a process by which molecules and atoms could be broken up and re-integrated on a large scale, now redoubled their efforts in the hope of enabling humanity to combat the probable conversion of wide areas of the earth into foreign atomic patterns.

FOUR days after the publication of Lapham's latest prophecy, there came the news of the three fresh storms he had predicted, which began in widely separate regions at intervals of little more than an hour. The first storm was in Mesopotamia, and Baghdad and Mosul were both lost in the towering columns of infinitesimal powder. The Tigris continued to flow into the area of the storm, but on the southern side it instantly ceased to run and soon became a dry bed till its junction with the Euphrates. The second storm occurred in the Black Forest, in Germany, and the third on the huge pampas of the Argentine. A new satellite, of a sulphur-yellow hue, was located above Germany by the Pyrenean telescope, as well as by those of many other observatories. The satellite above Mesopotamia was too far east to be within range of European astronomers; but the astronomers of two observatories in the Andes were successful in locating the Argentine body, which was also of a sulphur-yellow hue. This color, it was thought, might be associated with the production and use of the disintegrative ray.

The progress of a growing international panic was of course accelerated by the announcement of the new storms and satellites. People fled in numberless hordes from the neighborhood of the three disturbances, and grave social and economic conditions were created by this exodus. Certain industries were well-nigh paralyzed, traffic by air and land and water was seriously disordered; and the stock-market of the world was thrown into dire confusion, many standard stocks becoming suddenly worthless. Even at this early stage of the Venusian encroachment, there were many consequences of a far-reaching and oftentimes unexpected order, in all realms of mortal existence and effort.

All of the visible satellites were kept under close observation. On the night following the discovery of the sulphur-yellow orb above the Black Forest, it was found that the ruddy Saharan satellite had disappeared from its station; and no clue to its whereabouts could be obtained till the arrival of rumors from Timbuctoo and Ghadames, telling of a strange meteor that had fallen in broad daylight upon the region of massed vapors in El Juf. It had been watched by many desert tribesmen, by several caravans, and had been visible at a great distance, falling with preternatural and deliberate slowness, in a vertical line. It had

seemed to descend for nearly a minute before dropping into the vapors. Its color was a bright silver, it was round in form, and had not left the usual trail of flame that is made by a large meteor. The desert peoples looked upon it as a portent, foretelling the advent of Iblees and his demons.

"The first Venusian colony has landed," exclaimed Lapham, when these rumors were brought to him. "They have no doubt completed their evolutionary process, or have carried it to a degree that would render the African terrain inhabitable from their viewpoint."

While abject fear prevailed among the multitudes of humanity, and while scientists were engaged in eager speculation as to the nature of the Venusians, the rays employed by them, and the manner in which their spheres had been propelled through space and held in suspension above the earth, a number of new flashes were perceived on Venus by the vigilant astronomers of Colorado and Spain. No less than nine of these flashes were detected at the customary intervals on the same night, and on the following night there were nine more. Others, however, must have occurred during the daylight hours, for within five days, no less than thirty additional storms of atomic dust were reported from all over the world.

The areas of many were conterminate with the regions already affected, and were destined to extend enormously these regions; but many others were remotely scattered, and were to form independent nuclei for future manifestations. There were three storms in Australia, seven in Africa, six in Europe, six in Asia, five in the United States, and three in South America. Many more satellites, all of a sulphur-yellow hue, were located by astronomers above the realms of devastation that were being established. The destruction wrought was appalling in its scope, for a dozen great cities and hundreds of towns in thickly peopled regions were turned into cosmic powder by the disintegrating force. Berlin, Vienna, Florence, Teheran, Jerusalem, Kabul, Samarkand, Chicago, Kansas City, St. Paul and Pittsburgh, had become in an instant no more than memories. The Argentine tract was lengthening toward Buenos Ayres; and the ravages in northern Africa had been extended as far as Lake Tchad, which had contributed a cloud of fine steam, twenty thousand feet in height, to the whirling tempest of minute sand-particles. Even amid the universal horror and confusion, it was noted that nearly all the storms were in regions remote from the terrestrial seaboards. Lapham, on being appealed to for an explanation of this fact, made the following statement:

The process that is being carried on must inevitably be slow and gradual, on account of its tremendous magnitude; and many years will doubtless be required for its completion. The Venusians have selected inland areas for the neuclei of the geopolical and climatic metamorphosis, because the new atmospheres created above such areas will less readily be subject to immediate modification by the terrene oceans. However, if I am not mistaken, the seas themselves will eventually be attacked and will be vaporized and recondensed with the addition of elements favorable to the maintenance of Venusian air. The full extension of this latter process, on account of the lethal gases inherent in such air, will prove fatal to all remaining animal, or perhaps even plant, life of terrene origin, even if the geological changes are left incomplete."

V

ABSOLUTE madness and pandemonium were the concomitants of the thirty new storms. From the vicinity of all the centers involved, unending throngs of people poured in all directions toward the littorals of five continents. The entire shipping of the world, both naval and aerial, was laden with men, women and children who sought to flee the planetary peril; and those who were not fortunate enough to find room on any of the vessels, leapt into the surf or were driven from piers, cliffs and beaches by the pressure of the crowds behind. Innumerable thousands were drowned, while the streams of refugees came on day by day, night by night, utterly crazed with insensate terror,

and more of the deadly satellites were appearing and more storms were being instituted. Town after town, city after city, countryside after countryside, was emptied of its inhabitants, hordes of whom were caught in the onset of additional upheavals. Heroic efforts were made to re-establish some sort of order by the police and military forces of all the nations, but not much could be done, beyond organizing many of the North American, European and Asiatic throngs for migration toward the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions.

In the midst of all this pandemonium and destruction, however, the laboratories of the world continued their investigations, though one by one many of them were lost in the molecular cataclysms. When the progress of the tracts of devastation became more and more extensive, the chemists, inventors and various other experimenters concluded that it would be folly to remain any longer at their present posts. It was thought, from the general distribution of the storms, that the Antarctic circle would be the last portion of the globe that the invaders would attack; and the scientists of all countries, uniting in a common cause, made immediate preparations to remove their equipments and build laboratories in the heart of the polar plateau. The work of removal, through the aid of giant air-liners, was completed in an amazingly short period of time, though there were certain casualties and losses through the passage of planes above fresh regions that were being assailed by destructive rays.

Enough provisions for several years were carried along, and of course the wives and families of the various investigators accompanied them, as well as many thousands of people who were needed for work of a less expert, but essential, order. Whole towns of laboratories, as well as other buildings, were erected amid the Antarctic wastes, while the air-liners returned to fetch more people and more supplies. The scientific colonies were joined by the passengers of hundreds of fugitive air-vessels that had been wandering above the seas; and soon a goodly remnant of every nation had found shelter behind the southern barriers of ice and snow. Something was also done to house and provision the hordes that had fled to the north; and as much communication as possible was kept up between the two streams of humanity.

Roger Lapham, who was now in a state of tolerable convalescence, was invited to join the colonies of investigators, and went south in one of the first air-liners. He had wished to lead another expedition into northern Africa, with the idea of again penetrating the Juf, where the supposed meteor had been seen to descend, but was finally dissuaded from this rash plan when word came that the African terrain was now surrounded on all sides by violent upheavals, one of which had destroyed Timbuctoo.

TO THE colonies about the southern pole, there came the daily news of how the fearful work of planetary destruction and reintegration was progressing, from radio operators who were brave enough to remain at their posts till an unresponding silence offered proof that they had been annihilated one by one with the realms in which their stations had stood. The Venusian soil and air, with outlying fringes of atomic dissolution, were spreading like a series of cancers through the five continents, through regions that were almost emptied of human life by this time. The heavens were filled with the tiny satellites of changing colors, a score of which had descended to earth and had not been seen to rise again. What their occupants might now be doing was a mystery that intrigued all of the scientific fraternity. They felt the need of definite knowledge regarding these alien life-forms, who were obviously possessed of a high type of intelligence, and who displayed mechanical resources and a mastery of physics to which humanity had not yet attained.

VI

A RADIO dispatch from a lonely village in southern Florida brought to the Antarctic laboratories the news that one of the silver spheres had been seen close at hand by human beings for the first time. An orange-grower who had refused to abandon his plantation at the flight of nearly all his

neighbors, with his twelve-year-old son, who had remained with him, had observed the sphere flying toward them within a mile of the earth's surface, in a south-easterly direction. Apparently it had emerged from a partially converted tract involving Kentucky, Tennessee, and the northern borders of Alabama, where more than one of the spheres had already been known to land. The thing was flying slowly, at less than thirty miles an hour when first noticed; and it came gently to earth within three hundred yards of the orange-grower and his son, close to the edge of their orchard. The sphere seemed to be made of some whitish metal, was perfectly round, was at least two hundred feet in diameter, and had no visible projections anywhere. It resembled a miniature world or moon. When it approached the ground, a sort of framework consisting of four tripods of the same whitish metal, issued or unfolded from the sphere and served to support it when it came to rest. In this position, the lower part of the globe was no more than fifteen or twenty feet from the ground. A circular trap or man-hole opened in the bottom, and from this a stairway of metal steps was let down to earth. Seven creatures of an unearthly type descended the stairs forthwith and proceeded to examine their environment with all the air of a party of investigating scientists. They were perhaps four feet in height, with globular bodies; and they possessed three short legs and four extremely supple and jointless arms that issued from the side and back of smaller globes that were presumably their heads. These arms were all long enough to reach the earth, and were used to a certain extent in locomotion and the maintenance of equilibrium. The creatures were either equipped with natural coverings like the shards of insects or else they wore some kind of armor or suiting made of red and green metals, for they glittered gorgeously in the sunlight. The orange-grove seemed to interest them greatly, for they broke off several boughs laden with ripe fruit and one of their number forthwith carried the boughs into the sphere, holding them aloft with two of his odd arms. The other six roamed about the country-side and vanished from view for awhile, returning in less than an hour with numerous plant specimens and also with pieces of furniture, human clothing and tin cans, which they must have collected from the buildings on some deserted plantation. They re-entered the sphere, the metal stairway was drawn up, the trap was closed, and the great orb retracted its four tripods and flew away toward the ocean at an increased rate of speed that would soon bring it to the Bahama Islands. The orange-grower and his son, who had hid themselves behind a pile of empty lug-boxes and had scarcely dared to move for fear of attracting the Venusians' attention, now hurried to the local radio station, where the operator was still on duty, and sent a detailed report of what they had seen to the Antarctic laboratories.

A little later, the sphere was sighted from the Bahamas, but apparently it did not pause on any of these islands. Still later it was observed from Haiti, San Domingo, Martinique and the Barbadoes. Then it landed near Cayenne, where the natives were captured by the Venusians and taken aboard the sphere. Then the thing continued its south-easterly flight and was seen far out at sea from Pernambuco. An hour afterward it was sighted from St. Helena, and then it changed its course and flew directly south. It passed above Tristan de Cunha and disappeared from human observation for two days. Then a biplane, flying from the Sandwich Islands to the Antarctic, found the great orb floating in the sea, and reported this fact to the united scientists. It was at once surmised that the occupants had fallen ill and were perhaps dead, or at least were no longer able to operate the propulsive and levitative mechanism.

"Immediate contact with our soil and atmosphere," said Lapham, "has no doubt proved as dangerous for these beings as our own excursions into terrains formed after a Venusian pattern were dangerous for us. Probably they were a group of scientists who desired to gather data regarding terrestrial conditions, and were willing to chance the bodily peril."

Great excitement prevailed at the news of this find, and three armored planes

with heavy guns and a supply of explosives were sent to watch the floating sphere. The huge orb was half-submerged in the water; and no sign of life, no movement other than that of natural drifting, was detectible. At length, after some hesitation, the crew of the planes decided to fire a seven-inch shell at the exposed portion, even at the risk of shattering machinery that might prove of intense interest and value to humanity. To the surprise of everyone, the shell made no impression on the sphere, beyond denting its side a little and increasing the speed of its drift along the waters. Finally it was resolved to tow the thing to land. On being approached, it revealed a number of small circular and oval windows, filled with semi-translucent materials of green, amber and violet. It was beached on one of the South Shetland Islands. After vain attempts with milder explosives, the trap in the bottom was blasted open with thorite, a terrible new compound of solidified gases, with which whole mountains had been shattered. Evidently, the metal of the sphere was stronger and harder than any substance found or invented by human beings, and it was likewise ascertained to be heavier.

When the fumes of the explosion had cleared away, several scientists entered the sphere by means of a ladder. Much damage had been done by the thorite, and certain highly intricate mechanisms around the trap were hopelessly ruined, to the extreme regret of the investigators. But the body of the sphere, and its contents, were still intact. The interior was divided into a great number of curious compartments with octagonal walls, and had probably accommodated more than a thousand of the interplanetary voyagers on its trip to the earth. A large room above the trap opened off into three others of equally capacious extent, filled with machinery whose use and method of operation could not easily be determined. In the center of each room there stood an enormous contrivance made of about fifty metal cubes all joined together by means of heavy quadrangular rods. These rods, in turn, were all correlated by single-stranded wires of varying thickness, forming a huge net. Three different metals, all unfamiliar, were noted in the composition of the cubes, rods and wires in the different rooms. From each of the central engineries there issued great curving tubes that ramified into scores of smaller tubes arching the roof of the room in all directions and terminating in a series of no less than ten key-boards with many square and sphere-like knobs that were placed in a sort of elaborate rotation. The key-boards were attached to the walls. Before each of the circular windows, a device resembling a gigantic trumpet, with a hundred-angled lens of some glass-like material in its mouth, upreared from a tube that ran directly to the core of the cube-contrivance. The windows in each room were of a different color; and none of them, as well as none of the other windows in the sphere, was clearly permeable to human vision. On the outside of the sphere, opposite the large apartments, were found three disks that had a vague likeness to radio transmitters. All three were connected with the interior mechanism. It was imagined that these mechanisms were the source of the various rays employed in molecular dissolution and re-construction.

Also it was thought that the machinery wrecked by the thorite had served to propel and levitate the sphere.

AFTER examining the apparatus in the large rooms, the scientists began an investigation of the smaller apartments, most of which had evidently been used as living-quarters. The beds and furniture were truly strange. The former were round, shallow tubs, lined with down-like materials of incredible resiliency, in which the globe-like bodies of the invaders had reposed, with their arms depending over the sides or coiled close to their trunks. There were eating-rooms where, in metal troughs divided into bowl-like compartments, were the remains of bizarre and unidentifiable foods. The ceilings of the rooms were all low, in proportion to the stature of their inmates, and the investigators were often compelled to stoop. Mechanical resource and even luxury were manifest on every hand, and there were many special devices, of unknown use

and operation, that had probably ministered to the comfort of these odd beings.

After a number of rooms had been explored, a terrific stench was perceived, emanating through an open door. The bodies of six Venusians were found lying together where they had died, on the floor of what appeared to be a kind of laboratory. The place was filled with test-tubes of unfamiliar forms and materials and with all manner of scientific apparatus that aroused the interest and envy of the terrene investigators. The Venusians, when stricken, had manifestly been engaged in dissecting the body of one of the natives captured in Guiana, which was stretched and tied down on an operating table. They had flayed the dead Indian from head to foot and had laid open his entire viscera. The corpse of his companion was never found; but the contents of a number of tubes, on analysis, were discovered to represent the sundry chemical elements of which the human body is composed. Other tubes contained, in solution, the elements of oranges and of other terrestrial fruits and plant-forms.

The dead Venusians were no longer clothed in the gorgeous green and red shards that the Florida planter had reported them as wearing. They were quite naked, with bodies and limbs of a dark-gray color. Their skin was without any sign of hair and was divided into rudimentary scales or plates, suggesting that they had evolved from a reptilian ancestor of some unearthly type. But nothing else in their anatomy was denotive of the reptile, or, indeed, of any terrene mammalian form. Their long, curving arms and round bodies with neckless, globular heads offered a vague hint of enormous tarantulas. The heads were equipped with two small, sucker-like mouths protruding from the lower part, and were without anything that suggested aural or nasal organs. They had a series of short, retractile appendages, arranged at regular intervals about their whole circumference above the beginning of the four arms. In the end of each appendage was an eye-ball with many crystal-like facets, and every eye-ball was of a different color and possessed a different formation and disposition of facets.

On re-examining the mass of wrecked machinery, the seventh Venusian was found. His body had been blown into fragments and buried beneath a heap of twisted tubes and wires and disks. Apparently, when stricken down by the same illness as the others, he had been guiding the course of the great orb, and, perhaps in falling or in the throes of his culminative agony, had stopped the working of the propulsive mechanism. It was learned that all the Venusians had been slain by certain streptococci, comparatively harmless to human beings, with which they had been infected through contact with the dead Indians.

The finding and opening of the sphere created supreme interest and even aroused much hope among the united scientists. It was felt that if the principle of the disintegrative and re-constructive rays could be ascertained, much might be done to reconquer earth, or, at least, to stem the Venusian encroachments. But the three mechanisms of cubes, tubes and wires, and their manifold key-boards, baffled all ingenuity and all the mechanical science of the investigators for a long while. In the meantime, all those who had entered the sphere were smitten with unearthly diseases, and many died or were incapacitated for the remainder of their lives.

VII

WEEKS and months went by and lengthened somehow into a year. The metamorphosis of earth had gone slowly on, though after a term of three months no more of the deadly satellites had appeared from outer space. Lapham and others conjectured that perhaps the invasion from Venus had been undertaken with the sole idea of relieving a problem of over-population and had ceased with the solving of this problem. More than two hundred of the metal spheres had fallen under observation; and allowing only a thousand occupants for each, it was estimated that at least two hundred thousand of the hostile foreign entities had taken up their abode on earth. After partially converting all the continents, many of the spheres, as Lapham had predicted,

were now attacking the seas, and immense storms of vapor were reported daily from the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans. Even in the polar realms, the inevitable climatic and atmospheric changes were being felt. The air was already warmer and moister, and deleterious elements were invading it at the same time, causing a gradual increase of pulmonary maladies among the survivors of the human race.

However, in spite of all this, the situation had begun to present a few hopeful factors. Invention, beneath the spur of dread necessity, had made new progress, and some valuable scientific discoveries had occurred. Machinery for the direct utilization and conservation of solar energy on a large scale had been perfected, and gigantic refractors had been devised, by which the heat of the sun could be magnified and concentrated. With these refractors, large areas of eternal ice and snow were melted away, revealing a rich soil that was now utilized for agriculture and horticulture. With the resultant amelioration of living-conditions, humanity proceeded to entrench itself firmly and with a fair degree of comfort, in regions that had once been deemed altogether uninhabitable.

ANOTHER valuable invention was a televisual instrument of range and power beyond anything hitherto devised, by which, without the aid of a transmitting-apparatus, sight-images could be picked up at any terrene distance. The use of a well-known ray in connection with this invention, made it possible to penetrate the vaporous air that enshrouded the new terrains, and to watch the habits, movements and daily life of the invaders. In this way, much astounding knowledge was soon acquired concerning them. It was found that they had built many cities, of a peculiar squat type of architecture, in which some of the buildings were septangular and octagonal and others were cylinder-like or spherical in form. The cities were wrought of synthetic minerals and metals, and all the houses were connected by tubes which were employed for purposes of traffic. Passengers, or any desired article, could be shot through them to a given point in a few instants. The buildings were illumined with lamps made of radio-active materials. The Venusians had also begun the growing of ultra-terrestrial fruits and vegetables and the breeding of certain creatures that were more like gigantic insects than animals. The vegetables were mainly fungoid, were of prodigious size and complicated structure, and many of them were grown in artificial caverns beneath the stimulation of green and amber rays produced from orb-like mechanisms.

The habits and customs of the Venusians differed, as might be imagined, from those of human beings. It was learned that they required very little sleep, two or three hours being enough for the majority of them. Also, they did not eat more than once in four days. After their meals, they were very torpid for half a day and did not engage in much activity. This, in the eyes of many scientists, gave support to the theory that they had evolved from a reptilian form. They were bi-sexual; and, in further support of the above theory, their young were hatched from eggs. Apart from the vegetables aforementioned, their foods consisted of a great number of substances formed through chemical processes of a recondite order. They had a sort of pictorial art, of a geometric type resembling cubism, and a written literature that seemed to be concerned mainly with scientific and mathematical problems. It could not be found that any religious customs or rites were observed among them; and their trend of mind was predominantly scientific and mechanical. They had evolved a purely materialistic civilization and had carried it to a point far beyond that of the earth-peoples. Their knowledge of chemistry, physics, mathematics and all other branches of science, was so profound that it seemed well-nigh supernatural. The sundry instruments, tools and engines that they employed were a source of perpetual marvel to human inventors. There were optical instruments with a series of revolving lenses arranged above each other in metal frames, by means of which they apparently studied the heavens, in spite of the cloudy pall that hung forever upon their dominions. It was thought, however, that perhaps their myriad-faceted

eyes were more or less televisual and could penetrate many materials impervious to human sight. In support of this theory, the semi-opaque windows of the fallen sphere were recalled.

That which evoked the keenest interest, was the type of mechanism they had invented for the amplification of all sorts of cosmic rays, of solar light itself and even the most delicate and imperceptible emanations in the spectrum of remote stars. By a process of repercussion and concentration, such rays were compelled to afford power beyond that of steam or electricity. The magnified vibrations were employed in the breaking-up of atoms and in their re-construction. The breaking-up, it was soon learned, could be done in more than one way, according to the intensity of the vibration used.

By means of the higher vibrations, a terrific explosion could be caused in destroying one or two molecules and reducing them to their ultimate electrons. But the milder vibrations caused a more slow and incomplete explosion, in which the atom-formation was partially destroyed. This latter process was the one that had been used as a preliminary to the transformation of the world. Smaller mechanisms of a kind similar to those in the silver globe were in common use among the invaders, and all their air-vehicles, industrial machinery and various other appliances were run with power derived from the explosion of atoms by amplified cosmic rays. By watching the actual employment of these mechanisms, human scientists learned how the machinery in the derelict sphere had been operated. Also, the changing colors of the satellites were explained, for it was perceived that the generation of the various rays was accompanied by the production of an aura of color about the transmitting mechanism. As Lapham had surmised, yellow was the tone of destruction, blue the tint of mineral evolution, and red the hue of vegetable growth.

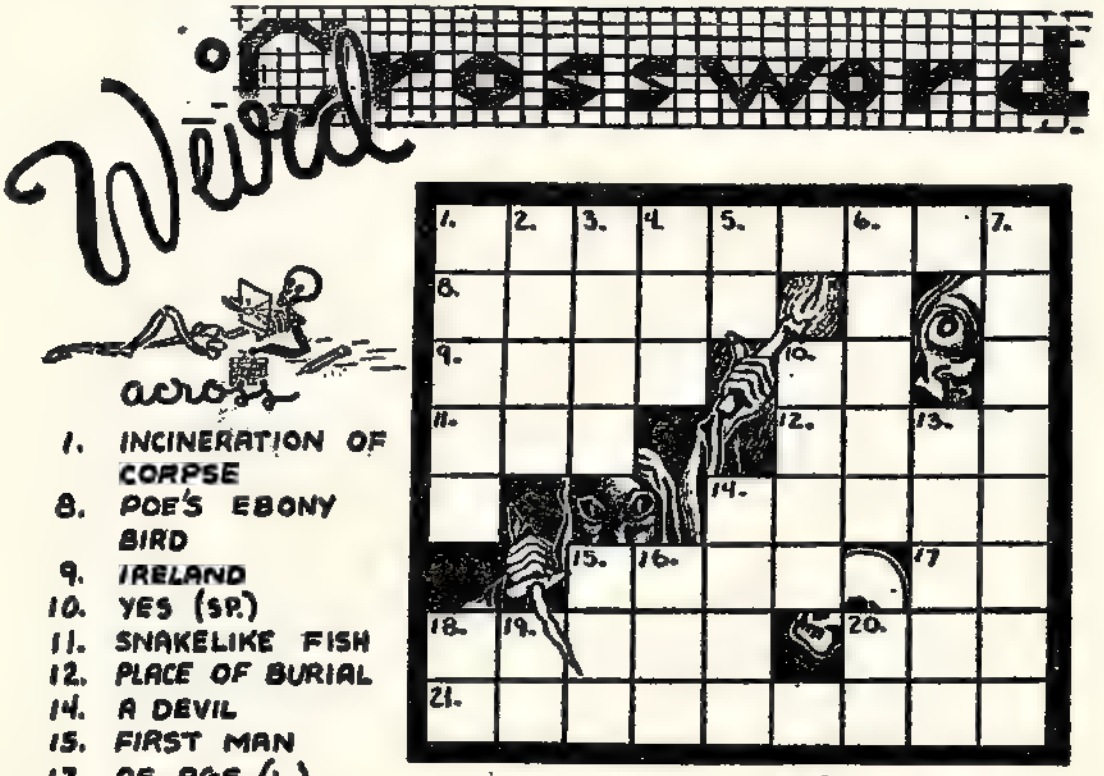
The invisibility of the two first spheres for a long period, was likewise explained, when it was learned that the Venusians could use at will, in connection with the other vibrations, a vibration that neutralized these customary colors. Probably, through motives of natural caution, they had wished to remain invisible, till observation had convinced them that nothing was to be feared from the world they were attacking.

NOW, with the knowledge acquired from their monstrous foes, human inventors were able to create similar machinery for destroying atoms and for re-constructing them in any desired pattern. Enormous planes were built and were fitted with this machinery, and a war of titanic destruction soon began. The Venusian territories of Australia were attacked by a fleet of four hundred planes, which succeeded in annihilating several of the metal spheres, as well as two cities of the enemy, and turned many hundred miles of vapor-covered land into a seething chaos of primeval dust. The invaders were totally unprepared, for evidently they had despised their human enemies and had not thought it worth while to watch their movements and activities at any time. Before they could rally, the planes had passed on to the shores of Asia, and had inflicted much damage in the Mesopotamian terrain.

At the present time, after twenty years of a warfare more stupendous than anything in human history, a fair amount of territory has been regained, in spite of terrible reprisals on the part of the Venusians. But the issue is still in doubt, and may not be decided for hundreds of years to come. The invaders are well-entrenched, and if re-enforcements should ever arrive from Venus, the tide may turn against humanity. The real hope lies in their limited number, and in the fact that they are not thriving physically in their new environment and are slowly becoming sterile as well as subject to a multitude of maladies, due, doubtless, to the incomplete conversion of the earth and its atmosphere and the tendency of tellurian atom-structures to re-establish themselves, even apart from the re-integration carried on by scientists. On the other hand, the vitiation of our seas and air by the introduction of deadly gases is not favorable to human life, and the

powers of medical science are not yet able to cope fully with the unusual problems offered.

Roger Lapham, whose clear, logical brain and prophetic insight have always been a source of inspiration to his fellows, has died lately and is mourned by all. But his spirit still prevails; and even if humanity should lose in the long and catastrophic warfare with an alien foe, the tale of mortal existence and toil and suffering will not have been told in vain.



across

1. INCINERATION OF CORPSE
8. POE'S EBONY BIRD
9. IRELAND
10. YES (SP.)
11. SNAKELIKE FISH
12. PLACE OF BURIAL
14. A DEVIL
15. FIRST MAN
17. OF AGE (L.)
18. FEEBLE-MINDED
20. POSSESSIVE PRONOUN
21. USER OF WITCHCRAFT

down

1. SKIN'S REACTION TO *Weird Tales*
2. UNCOMMON
3. WICKED
4. MALE (PL)
5. ONE
6. MODE OF EXPRESSION
7. WITHOUT FEELING
10. STOCK
13. WATER FILLED TRENCHES
14. PALM FRUIT
15. MELODY
16. DOCUMENT (RBBR.)
18. EXISTS
19. TO PERFORM
20. THAT IS (L.)

(*Answers on page* 88)

Church in the Jungles

BY ARTHUR J. BURKS

Heading by Lee Brown Coye

I HARBORED no fear of the supernatural. There was more than enough Nature around me of which to be afraid. I had roamed into the Central Brazilian jungles south of Belterra that morning. I had lost my party. I had played the fool as so many adventurers did. I had left my outfit to search the woods myself. They were all armed; I was not. I did not believe in firearms. I didn't even carry a stick to smash snakes. I knew it was possible, even with a compass, to lose myself within a hundred yards of the camp. I did just that.

When darkness fell terror rode me. I was not afraid of animals, particularly. There was a possibility of being bitten by snakes, and I had had narrow escapes; but the balance of chance was against it. The other animals of the forest, the jaguar, ocelot, the great otter, gave man a wide berth. Other men had vanished into the jungles, to be seen no more, but I felt pretty sure that one of two things had happened to them: they had been shot by Indians, or stepped into holes.

There was one other possibility; animals sometimes broke off tops of shrubs, leaving spine-sharp points which hardened to rock-like consistency. If one fell on one of those points it would be like Saul falling upon his sword.

There were no Indians anywhere near Belterra that one needed to fear, hadn't been for fifty years, maybe longer.

My dread was holes. The jungles were filled with them. When it rained heavily, water stood in low places. Then the bottom fell out of such pools, literally. I had almost stepped into holes ten, twelve, fifteen feet deep. And every one had been man-size. A man could step in, but without help he would never be able to get out of the hole.

How had I got out to my refuge in the darkness of the night?

That was my principal dread when night caught me. I yelled. I was too far away even

for the dogs to hear me. I yelled myself hoarse. I knew that the wise thing was to sit down and wait for morning. My comrades would expect me to do that. Then I'd be trailed and collected. I did sit down for a few minutes, but it takes a man with grim determination to sit quietly through the hours in the Brazilian jungles. So many things crawl, sniff, rattle the leaves, chitter, twitter, flutter invisible wings. Limbs break with sounds like pistol shots; it *could* be jaguar, tapir, the great otter. That sound could be the *sucurijú*, the python, creeping up to drop coils around one.

No, the holes were preferable. Besides, walking in the dark, one could always slide the feet, test each spot before setting the foot down. In any case one *moved*.

I walked, sometimes bumping into the thick trees, sometimes putting my extended hands against spined palms. Occasionally, a hundred feet aloft, a star peered through a space in the wind-whispering crown to see how I was making out.

I yelled again.

Nobody answered, but shortly after that I saw the lantern. It gave me a queer feeling, for we had no lantern with us. Back at camp there was just the usual fire to keep off the jaguar, or to keep him warm if he wasn't afraid of fire.

I don't believe in the supernatural, but I was thrilled a little, anyway. I knew, if my Brazilian friends spoke truly, that there was nobody in our strip of jungle but us.

I moved slowly, carefully, sliding my feet, toward the lantern. As I went I remembered a tale told last night, of a haunted jungle church occasionally reported by wanderers down the centuries. It wasn't in any given place. It just appeared when a wanderer was afraid, or approaching dangerous trouble, and somehow *saved* him. A ghostly priest, the tale said, signaled the wanderer with a swinging lantern!

THAT lantern was real enough. I stepped into mud over my shoetops. I moved to the right, then to the left. I was on the edge of a swamp, I decided, and the lantern was out in it somewhere. That was really odd; it carried coincidence a bit further than most people would accept, for the "ghost church" always appeared on some safe, sound high place in a swamp!

There would be a way out to the lantern, a causeway of some kind. That's what the tale said, and common sense seemed to indicate the possibility. Ghost or real, the lantern swinger had got out there somehow. I found the causeway, a natural series of hummocks, grown together, angling, twisting out into the swamp. There was no doubt now about it being swamp. I heard alligators grunt, lash their tails on the water. I didn't know whether to be glad or sorry I could not see. I *did* see red eyes, two by two, watching me. Some of them came close, paralleling my course. But the causeway rose beyond their reach. I could see a priest, now, holding the lantern high. I called to him, and he made some sort of answer which I could hear, but not understand. I saw a building behind him. I could see its door, and well inside the door, candles.

I reached the priest, scarcely knowing whether to laugh hysterically or take this all as a matter of course. I put forth my hand to grasp his, but whether by accident or design, he evaded my handshake, bowing slightly. He wasn't Brazilian, but German, I thought, or maybe American. There were German and American Franciscans in the valley of the Tapajos River, of which this uninhabited area was part. The priest indicated that I was to pass through the door. I understood then why speech was taboo; some sort of ritual was in progress, solemn devotions. The priest signaled me to benches to my right as I entered. There were other men there, Brazilian and Indian. None of my people were here, however, and nobody turned to look at me. The priest who had signaled me to safety went forward. Two other priests murmured in Latin at two altars to right and left, behind the communion railing. The priest who had awaited my coming proceeded to the higher, central altar.

Mass was being read here by three priests. Odd, I thought; down here I had never participated in night mass except at Christmas, but always early in the morning. But I knew little of the priestly craft, though I was not irreligious.

The priests were cowled. There were kneeling women behind the benches to the left. Several of them were nuns in black, with black bonnets covering, or at least hiding, their faces. I knelt, too, thankful I had escaped, until devotions were ended.

SLOWLY nuns and two of the priests whom I had not met, rose and left the church, hands clasped before them, not looking at me. They had no interest in me. I could not see them *too* well, for I had been watching the flickering candles which had almost blinded me.

The priest who had doubtless saved my life was the only one left. He stood before me, smiling. His face was white, beautiful, his teeth perfect. He held the lantern so that I could see his face. He wore brown habit, I noticed, the only one of which I was sure.

"We are sorry we have no accommodations for travelers," the priest said to me in amazingly correct English, slowly and precisely, as if he first interpreted from some other language. "There are only our cells. The sisters have a building out there," he moved his head to indicate outside, to the right, "and we have a building on the other side of *Igreja Perdida*. But you may use my favorite place. Come!"

I got a slight bang out of his use of the words *Igreja Perdida*, for that had been the name of the "ghost" church my comrades had talked about around the campfire last night. Lost Church!

The priest—he never gave me his name—led me to a place in the wall of the church where a tree grew right through, or where the church had been built around the tree. Two huge limbs divided there to form an area, bed-size, shoulder-high, that did look inviting.

"I often meditate there," the priest said. "When there is no sound, alligators sometimes wander into the church. It is also not unknown to the python, but you will be quite safe. We are so poor, there won't even be coffee in the morning. . . ."

"I'll be fine," I said. I saw one of the nuns, now snuffing the candles. I supposed she was the sacristan. "A night's sleep and I'll be swell!"

He stood until I climbed up, sighed, straightened out. He stood until the candles were all snuffed and darkness was complete save for his lantern. I didn't see what became of the nun. The priest went to the door by which I had entered, raised the lantern, snicked up the chimney, blew out the flame. Utter darkness descended. I had the vaguest idea of the church. Big, I thought, big, old, falling apart. It had a musty smell.

I slept like a log.

I wakened with the sun in my face. I sat up in my big crotch of tree, looked around me. There was swamp everywhere. The snouts of many alligators rested on the water, beady eyes watching me, waiting for me to fall. I almost did, when I realized that there was no church, had therefore been no priest, lantern, nuns, candles, altars, incense or mass. But could I ever be sure of that?

How had I got out to my refuge in the blackness of night? That's what my friends asked me when, an hour after dawn, I heard their shouts, answered them and they came to the edge of the swamp. I could find no way to get out of the swamp; it was two hours before they found a way in. Even then I had great difficulty jumping from hummock to hummock behind them, going out.

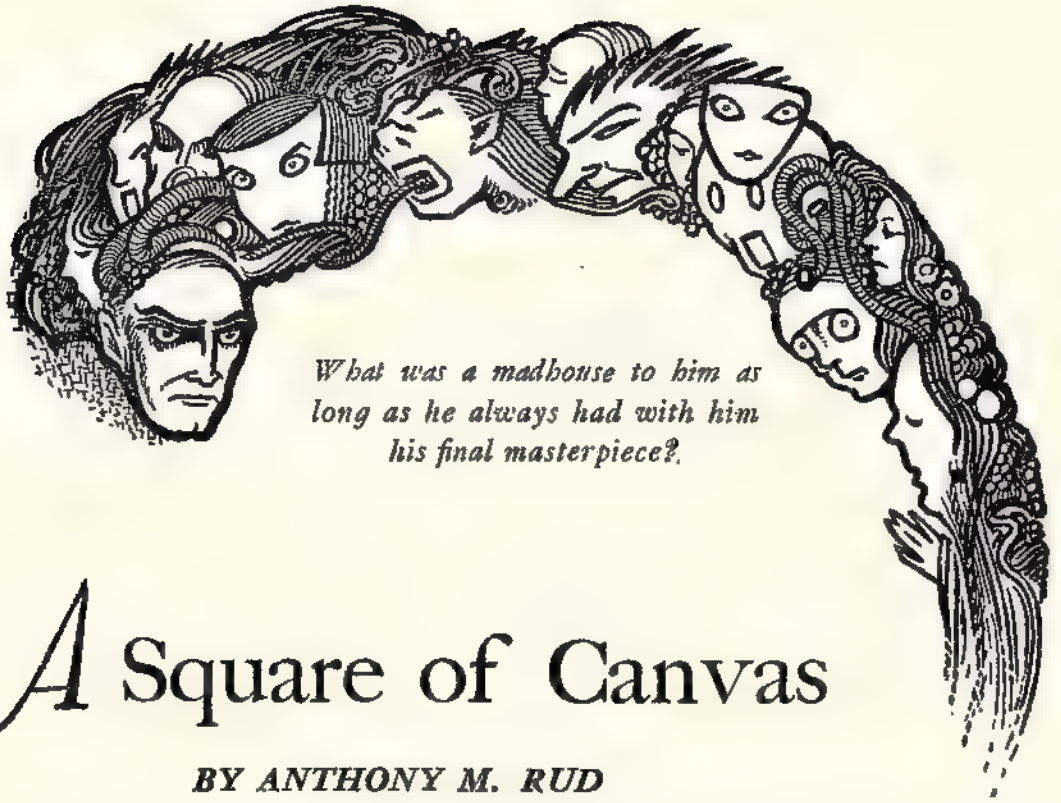
"How did you get out there?" they asked.

"Jumped from back to back of the alligators!" I said.

"Nonsense!"

"Well, then, you remember that story you told me about *Igreja Perdida*? I saw a lantern. A priest was waving it. I simply followed it."

I told them exactly what had happened to me. They didn't believe a word of it. It sounded too much like the "ghost" church tale they had told me the night before. I knew no way to change the story, however.



What was a madhouse to him as long as he always had with him his final masterpiece?

A Square of Canvas

BY ANTHONY M. RUD

"NO, MADAME, I am *not* insane! I see you hide a smile. Never mind attempting to mask the expression. You are a newcomer here and have learned nothing of my story. I do not blame my visitor—the burden of proof rests upon us, *n'est-ce-pas?*

"In this same ward you have met several peculiar characters, have you not? We have a motley assemblage of conquerors, diplomats, courtesans and divinities—if you'll take their words for it. There is Alexander the Great, Richelieu, Julius Caesar, Spartacus, Cleopatra—but no matter. *I* have no delusion. I am Hal Pemberton.

"You start? You believe *this* my delusion? Look closely at me! I have aged, it is true, yet if you have glimpsed the Metropolitan gallery portrait that Paul Gauguin did of me when I visited Tahiti. . . ?"

I gasped, and fell back a pace. This silver-haired, kindly old soul the mad genius, Pemberton? The temptation was strong to flee when I realized that he told the truth! I knew the portrait, indeed, and for an art student like myself there could be no mistaking the resemblance. I stopped, half-turned. After all, they allowed him freedom of the grounds. He could be no worse, surely, than the malignant Cleopatra whom I just had left playing with her "asp"—a five-inch garter snake she had found crossing the gravel path.

"I—I believe you," came my stammered reply.

What I meant, of course, was that no doubt could exist that he was, certainly, Hal Pemberton. His seamed face lighted up; it was plain *he* believed that establishment of identity made the matter of his detention absurd.

"They have me registered as Chase—John Chase," he confided. "Come! Would a true story of an artist's persecution interest you? It is a recital of misunderstanding, bigotry. . . ."

He left the sentence incomplete, and beckoned with a curl of his tapered, spatulate index finger toward a bench set fair in the sunshine just beyond range of blowing mists from the fountain.

I was tempted. A guard was stationed less

than two hundred feet distant. Notwithstanding the horrid and distorted legends which shrouded our memories of this man—supposed to have died in far-off Polynesia—he could not harm me easily before assistance was available. Besides, I am an active, bony woman of the grenadier type. I waited until he sat down, then placed myself gingerly upon the opposite end of the bench.

"You are the first person who has not laughed in my face when learning my true identity," he continued then, making no attempt to close the six-foot gap between us—much to my comfort. "*Ignorance* placed me here. Ignorance keeps me. I shall give you every detail, Madame. Then you may inform others and procure my release. The *cognoscenti* will demand it, once they know of the cruel intolerance which has stolen nine years from my career and from my life. You know—" and here Pemberton glanced guardedly about before he added in a whisper, "*they won't let me paint!*

"My youth and training are known in part. Alden Sefferich's brochure dealt with the externals, at least. You have read it? Ah, yes! Dear Alden knew nothing, really. When I look at his etchings of buildings—at his word sketch of myself—I see behind the lines and letters to a great void.

At best, he was an admirable camera equipped with focal-plane shutter and finest anastigmatic lenses depicting three dimensions faithfully in two, yet ignoring the most important fourth dimension of temperament and soul as though it were as mythical as that fourth dimension played with by mathematicians.

"It is not. Artistic inspiration—what the underworld calls *yen*—has been my whole life. Beyond the technique and inspiration furnished by Guarneresi, one might scrap the whole of tutelage and still have left—myself, and the divine spark!

"I was one of the Long Island Pembertons. Two sisters still are living. They are staid, respectable ladies who married well. To hell with them! They *really* believed that Hal Pemberton disgraced them, the nauseating prigs!

"Our mother was Sheila Varro, the singer. Father was an unimaginative sort, president of the Everest Life and Casualty Company for many years. I mention these facts merely to show you there was no hereditary taint, no connate reason for warped mentality such as they attribute to me. That I inherited the whole of my poor mother's artistic predilection there is possibility for doubt, for she was brilliant always. I was a dullard in my youth. It was only with education and inspiration that even a spark of her divine creative fury came to me—but the story of that I shall reach later.

"AS A BOY, I hated school. Before the age of ten I had been expelled from three academies, always on account of the way I treated my associates. I was cruel to other boys, because lessons did not capture my attention. Nothing quiet, static, like the pursuit of facts, *ever* has done so.

"When I tired of sticking pins into younger lads, or pulling their hair, I sought out one or another of my own size and fought with him. Often—usually—I was trounced, but this never bothered. Hurt, blood and heat of combat always were curiosities to me—impersonal, somehow. As long as I could stand on my feet I would punch for the nose or eyes of my antagonist, for nothing delighted me like seeing the involuntary pain flood his countenance, and red blood stream from his mashed nostrils.

"Father sent me to the New York public schools, but there I lasted only six or seven weeks. I was not popular either with my playmates or with the teachers, who complained of what they took to be abnormality. I had done nothing except arrange a pin taken from the hat of one of the women teachers where I thought it would do the most good. This was in the sleeve of the principal's greatcoat.

"When he slid in his right hand the long pin pierced his palm, causing him to cry out loudly with pain. I did not see him at the moment, but I was waiting outside his office at the time, and I gloated in my mind at the picture of his stabbed hand, ebbing drops of blood where the blue steel entered.

"I longed to rush in and view my work, but did not dare. Later, when by some shrewd deduction they fastened the blame

on me, Mr. Mortenson had his right hand bandaged.

"Father gave up the idea of public school after this, and procured me a tutor. He thought me a trifle deficient, and I suppose my attitude lent color to such a theory. I tormented the three men who took me in hand, one after the other, until each one resigned. I malingered. I shirked. I prepared 'accidents' in which all were injured.

"It was not that I could not learn—I realized all along that simple tasks assigned me by these men could be accomplished without great effort—but that I had no desire to study algebra, geography and language, or other dull things of the kind. Only zoology tempted in the least; and none of the men I had before Jackson came was competent to do much of anything with the absorbing subject.

"Jackson was the fourth, and last. He proved himself an earnest soul, and something of a scientist. He tried patiently for a fortnight to teach me all that Dad desired, but found his pupil responsive only when he gave me animals to study. These, while alive, interested me.

"One day, after a discouraging session with my other studies, he left me with some small beetles which he intended to classify on his return. It was a hot day, and the little sheath-winged insects were stimulated out of dormance to lively movement. I had them under a glass cover to prevent their escape.

"Just to see how they acted, I took them out, one by one, and performed slight operations upon parts of their anatomy with the point of my penknife. One I deprived of wings, another lost two legs of many, a third was deprived of antennae, and so on. Then I squatted close with a hand-lens and eyed their desperate struggles.

"Here was *life, pain, struggle*—death close by, leering at the tiny creatures. It fascinated me. I watched eagerly, and then, when one of the beetles grew slower in moving, I stimulated it with the heated point of a pin.

"At the time—I was then only sixteen years of age—I had no analytical explanation of interest, but now I know that the artist in me was swept through a haze of adolescence by sight of that most sincere of all the struggles of life, the struggles against *death!*

"A fever raced in my blood. I knew the beetles could not last. An instinct made me wish to preserve some form of record of their supreme moment. I seized my pencil. I wrote a paragraph, telling how I would feel in case some huge, omnipotent force should put me under glass, remove my legs, stab me with the point of a great knife, a red-hot dagger, and watch my writhings.

"The description was pale, colorless, of course. It did not satisfy, even while I scribbled. As you may readily understand, I possessed no power of literary expression; crude sentences selected at random only emphasized the need of expression of a better sort. Without reasoning—indeed, many a person would have considered me quite mad at the time—I tore a clean sheet of paper from a thick tablet and fell to *sketching* rapidly, furiously!

"As with writing, I knew nothing of technique—I never had drawn a line before—but the impelling force was great. Before my eyes I saw the picture I wished to portray—the play of protest against death. I drew the death struggle. . . .

"BY THE time Jackson returned the fire had died out of me.

"The horrid sketch was finished, and all but one of the beetles lay, legs upturned, under the glass. That one had managed to escape somehow, and was dragging itself hopelessly across the table, leaving a wet streak of colorless blood to mark its passing. Exhausted in body and mind, I had collapsed in the nearest chair, not caring whether I, myself, lived or died.

"Poor Jackson was horrified when he saw what I had done to the *Coleptera*, and he began reproaching me for my needless cruelty. Just as he was waxing eloquent, however, his eye caught sight of my crude sketch. He stopped speaking.

"I saw him tremble, adjust his pince-nez and stare long at the poor picture I had made, and then at the dead beetles. Finally, seeming in a torment of anger, he read the

paragraph of description, turning to examine me with horror and amazement in his glance.

"Then, suddenly, he sprang to his feet, gripping the two sheets of paper in his hands, swung about, and made off before I could rouse from my lassitude sufficiently to question him. I never saw Jackson again. The poor fool.

"An hour later Father sent for me. I knew that the tutor had been to see him, and I expected another of the terrible lectures I had been in habit of receiving each time a new lack or iniquity made itself apparent to others. On several occasions in the past Father had flogged me, and driven himself close to the verge of apoplexy because of his extreme anger at what he deemed deliberate obstinacy. I feared whippings; they sickened me. My knees were quaking as I went to his study.

"This time, however, it was plain that father had given up. He was pale, weighed down with what must have been the great disappointment of his life; but he neither stormed nor offered to chastise me. Instead he told me quietly that Jackson had resigned, finding me impossible to instruct.

"In a few sentences Father reviewed the efforts he had made for my education, then stated that all the tutors had been convinced that my lack of progress had been due more to a chronic disinclination for work rather than to any innate defect of body or mind.

" 'So far,' he told me, 'you have refused steadfastly to accept opportunity. Now we come to the end. Mr. Jackson has showed me a sketch made by you in which he professes to see real talent. He advises that you be sent abroad to study drawing or painting. Would you care for this last chance? Otherwise I must place you in an institution of some kind, where you no longer can bring disgrace and pain upon me—a reform school, in short. I tell you frankly, Hal, that I am ready to wash my hands of you.'

"What could I do? I chose, of course, to go to Paris. Father made the necessary arrangements for me to enter Guarneresi's big studios as a beginner, paying for a year in advance, and making me a liberal allowance in addition.

" 'I shall not attempt to conceal from you, Hal,' he told me at parting, 'that I do not wish you to return. Your allowance will continue just as long as you remain abroad. If, in time, a moderate success in some line of endeavor comes to you I shall be glad to see you again, but not before. The Pembertons never were failures or parasites.'

"Thus I left him. He died while I was in my third year at the studio, and by his express wish I was not notified until after the funeral was over. I wept over the letter that came, but only because of the knowledge that now I never could make up in any way for the great sorrow I had caused my father. Had he lived only ten years longer—and this would not have been extraordinary, as he died at the age of fifty-two—I could have restored some of that lost pride to him.

"IS IT necessary to tell of my years with Guarneresi? No; you confessed some slight knowledge of me. Very well, I shall pass over them lightly. Suffice it to say that here at last I found my forte. I could paint. The *maestro* never valued my efforts very highly, but he taught with conscientious diligence nevertheless. In the use of sweeping line and chiaroscuro I excelled the majority of his pupils, but in color I exhibited no talent—in *his* estimation, at least.

"It was strange, too, for through my mind at odd intervals swept riots of crimson, orange and purple, which never could be mixed satisfactorily upon my pallette for any given picture. I told myself that the fault lay as much in the subjects of my pictures as in myself—the excuse of a liar, of course.

"There *was* some excuse there, however. For instance, when we painted nudes Guarneresi would assemble a half-dozen old hags with yellowed skin, bony torsos and shriveled breasts, asking us to portray youth and beauty. Instead of attempting to pin a fabric of imagination upon such skeletons, I used to search out the more beautiful of the cocottes of the night cafes, and bring with me to the studio the next day memories and hurried sketches of poses in which I had seen them. This was more interesting, but unsatisfactory withal.

"I had been five years in the studio, and had traveled three winters to Sicily, Sardinia and Italy, before the first hint of a resolution of my problem came to me. It was in the month of July, when north-loving students take their vacations.

"I was alone in the vast studio one afternoon. Guarneresi himself was absent, which accounted for the holiday taken by the faithful who remained during the hot days. On one side of the room were the cages, where the *maestro* kept small live animals, used for models with beginners. There were a few rabbits, a dozen white mice and a red fox.

"Wandering about, near to my wits' end for inspiration to further work, I chanced to see one of the rabbits looking in my direction. Rays of sunlight, falling through the open skylight, caught the beast's eyes in such a manner that they showed to me as round discs of *glowing scarlet*.

"Never had I witnessed this phenomenon before, which I since have learned is common. It had an extraordinary effect upon me. In that second I thought of my delinquent boyhood, of dozens of cruel impulses since practically forgotten—of the mutilated, dying beetles which had been instrumental in embarking me upon an art career.

"Blood rose in torrents to my own temples. A fever consumed me. There was life and *there could be death*. I could renew the inspiration of those tortured beetles.

"WITH agitated stealth, I glanced out into the empty hallway, locked the door of the studio, drew four shades over windows through which I might be seen, and crept to the rabbit cage.

"Opening it, I seized by the long ears the white-furred animal which had stared at me. The warm softness of its palpitating body raised my artistic desire to a frenzy. I pulled a table from the wall, and holding down the animal upon it I drew my knife. Overcoming the mad, futile struggles of the rabbit, I slit long incisions in the white back and belly. The blood welled out. . . .

"Perfect fury of delight sent me to my canvas. My fingers trembled as I mixed the colors, but there was no indecision now, and no hint of muddiness in the result. I painted. . . .

"You perhaps have seen a reproduction of that picture? It was called "THE LUSTS OF THE MAGI," and now hangs in one of the Paris galleries. Some day it will grace the Louvre. And all because our white, rabbit had sacrified its heart's blood.

"At eleven next morning Guarneresi himself, coming to the studio, found me exhausted and asleep upon the floor. When he demanded explanations, I pointed in silence to the finished picture upon my easel.

"I thought the man would go frantic. He regarded it for an instant, with intolerance fading from his bearded face. Then his mouth gaped open, and a succession of low exclamations in his native tongue came forth. His raised hands opened and shut in the gesture I knew to mean unrestrained delight.

"Suddenly he dashed to the easel, and, before I could offer resistance, he snatched down my picture and ran with it out of the studio and down the stairs into the narrow street. I followed, but I was not swift enough. He had disappeared.

"In half an hour he returned with four brother artists who had studios nearby. The others were more than lavish in their praise, terming my picture the greatest masterpiece turned out in the Quarter for years. Guarneresi himself was less demonstrative now, but I detected tears in his eyes when he turned to me.

" 'The pupil has become the master,' he said simply. 'Go! I did not teach you this, and I cannot teach you more. Always I shall boast, however, that Signor Pembérton painted his first great picture in my studio.'

"The next day I rented a studio of my own and moved out my effects immediately. I started to paint in earnest. There is little to relate of the next few months. A wraith of the inspiration which had given birth to my great picture still lingered, but I was no better than mediocre in my work. True the experience and accomplishment had improved me somewhat in use of color, but I learned the galling truth soon enough that never could I attain that same fervor of artistry again—unless. . . .

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Solution of puzzle on page 79

"After four months of ineffectual striving—during which time I completed two unsatisfactory canvases—I yielded, and bought myself a second white rabbit. What was my horror now to discover, when I treated the beast as I had treated its predecessor, that no wild thrill of inspiration assaulted me.

"I could mix and apply colors a trifle more gaudily, yet the suffering and blood of this animal had lost its potent effect upon me. After a day or two the solution occurred. *Lusts of the Magi* had exhausted the stimulus which rabbits could furnish.

"Disconsolate now, I allowed my work to flag. Though I knew in my heart that the one picture I had done was splendid in its way, I hated to believe that in it I had reached the peak of artistic production. Yet I could arouse in myself no more than the puerile enthusiasm for methodical slapping on of oils I so ridiculed in other mediocre painters. Finally, I stopped altogether, and gave myself over to a fit of depression, absinthe and cigarettes.

"Guarneresi visited me one day, and finding me so badly in the dumps prescribed fresh air and sunshine. As I refused flatly to travel, knowing my ailment to be of the subjective sort, not cured by glimpses of pastures new, he lent me his saddle mare, a fine black animal with white fetlocks and a star upon her forehead. I agreed listlessly to ride her each day.

"Three weeks slipped by. I had kept my promise—actually enjoying the exercise—but without any of the beneficent results appearing. I was in fair physical health—only a trifle listless—it is true, yet whenever I set myself to paint a greater inhibition of spiritual and mental weariness seemed to hold me back. Little by little, the ghastly conviction forced itself upon me that as an artist I had shot my bolt.

"One day, when I was riding a league or two beyond Passy, I had occasion to dismount and slake my thirst at a spring on which it was necessary to break a thin crust of ice. Drinking my fill I led the mare to the spot, and she drank also. In raising her head, however, a sharp edge of ice cut her tender skin the distance of a quarter inch.

There, as I watched, *I saw red drops of blood gather on her cheek.*

"I cannot describe adequately the sensations that gripped me! In that second I remembered the beetles and the rabbit; and I *knew* that this splendid animal had been given to me for no purpose other than to renew the wasted inspiration within me. It was the hand of Providence.

"PREPARATIONS soon were made. I obtained the use of a spacious well-lighted barn in the vicinity, and put the mare therein while I returned to Paris for canvases and materials. Then, when I was all ready for work, I hobbled the mare with strong ropes, and tied her so she could not budge. Then I treated her as I had treated the rabbit.

"Deep down I hated to inflict this pain, for I had grown to care for that mare almost as one cares for a dear friend; but the fury of artistic desire would not be denied.

"Next day, when all was over, I took the canvas in to Paris and showed it to Guarneresi. He went into ecstasies, proclaiming that I had reawakened, indeed. Yet when I told him of the mare and offered to pay his own price, he became very white of countenance and drew himself up, shuddering.

" 'Any but as great a man as yourself, Signor,' he shrilled, his cracked old voice breaking with emotion, 'I should *kill* for that. Yourself are without the law which would damn another, but *not* outside the sphere of undying hatred. You are great, but awful. *Go!*'

"I found, then, that no one wished to look at my picture. Guarneresi had told the story to sympathetic friends, and it had spread like a fire in spruce throughout the Quarter. I was ostracized, deserted by all who had called me their friend.

"A month later, nearly broken in spirit, I came to New York. I was done with Paris. Here in America none knew the story of my last painting, and when it was put on exhibition the critics heralded it as greater far than the finest production of any previous or contemporary American artist. I sold it for twenty thousand dollars, which was a good price in those days.

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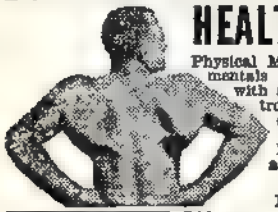

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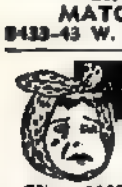

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"I was swept up on a tide of popularity. As you know, in this country even the poorest works of a popular man are snatched up avidly. Criticism seems to die when once a reputation is attained. I got rid of all the canvases I had painted in Paris, and was besieged for portrait sittings by society women of the city.

"Because I had no particular idea in mind for my next painting I did allow myself to drift into this work. It was easy and paid immensely well. Also I was called upon to exercise no ingenuity or imagination. All I did was paint them as they came, two a week, and get rich, wasting five years in the process.

"Then I fell in love. Beatrice was much younger than myself, just turned nineteen at the time. I was first attracted to her because my eye always seeks out the beautiful in face and form as if I were choosing models among all the women I meet.

"She was slim of waist and of ankle, though with the soft curve of neck and shoulder which intrigues an artist instantly. She was more mature in some ways than one might have expected of her years—but the more delightful for that reason.

"Her eyes were dark pools rippled by the breeze of each passing fancy. The moment I looked into them I knew that wrench of the heart which bespeaks the advent of the one great emotion. Many times before I had thought myself in love, yet in company of Beatrice I wondered at my self-deception. In the evening, as she sat beside me in a nook of Sebastian's Spice Gardens—you know, the great indoor reproduction of the famous gardens of Kandy, Ceylon—I gloried in her beauty, and in the way soft silk clung to her person. The desire for possession was intolerable within me. Before parting I asked her, and for answer she lifted her soft, white arms to my neck and met my lips with a caress in which I felt the whole fervor of love. That was the sweetest and happiest moment of my life.

"We married, and built ourselves a home upon Long Island. After three months of honeymoon we settled there, more than ever in love with each other if that were possible.

"A year sped by. Ten months of this I

spent without lifting a brush to canvas. It was idyllic, yet toward the last a sense of shame began to pervade my mind. Was I of such weak fibre that the love of one woman must stamp out all ambition, all desire for accomplishment?

"At the end of the year I was painting again, making portraits. The long rest and happiness had made me impatient with such piffle, however. I had all the money that either of us could need in our lifetime, so I could not take the portraiture seriously. I dabbled with it another full year, without once endeavoring to start a serious piece of work.

"Then, after Beatrice bore me a daughter, I began to lay plans for continuing serious endeavor. It is useless to repeat the story of those struggles. It was the same experience I had had after that first successful picture.

"My technique now was as near perfection as I could hope to attain, and the mere matter of color mixing I had learned from those two wild flights of frenzy. I found myself, however, psychologically unable to attack a subject smacking in the least of the gruesome—and that, of course, always had been my talent and interest.

"I REBELLED against the instinct which urged me to try the experiment of the mare again. In cold blood I hated the thought of it, and also I feared, with a great sinking of the heart, that I should find no more inspiration there even if I did repeat.

"I turned to landscape painting, choosing sordid, dirty or powerful scenes. I painted the fish-and-milk carts on Hester Street, showing the hordes of dirty urchins in the background playing on the pavement. Somehow, the picture fell short of being really good, although I had no difficulty in selling it.

"I portrayed, then, a street in the Ghetto on a rainy night, with greasy mud shining on the cobblestones and the shapeless figure of a man slouched in a doorway. This was called powerful—the 'awakening of an American Franz Hals' one critic termed it—but I knew better. Beside the work I *could* do under powerful stimulus and inspiration, this was slush, slime. I *hated* it!

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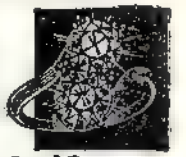

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"Even waterscapes did not satisfy. I painted half of one picture depicting two sooty, straining tugs bringing a great leviathan of a steamer into harbor, but this I never finished. I felt as if I drooled at the mouth while I was working.

"Thus two more years went by, happy enough when I was with Beatrice, but sad and savage when I was by myself in the studio. My wife had blossomed early into the full beauty of womanhood, and yet she retained enough of modesty and reticence of self that I never wearied of her. Because up to this time, when I turned thirty-three years of age, the powers of both of us, physical and mental, had been on the increase, we still were exploring the delights of love and true affection.

"There was an impelling force within me, however, which would not be denied. I had been born to accomplish great things. Weak compromise, or weaker yielding to delights of the mind and body, could but heap fresh fuel on the flame which consumed me when I got off by myself. I fought against it months longer, but in the end I had to yield. With fear and trepidation struggling with ambition and lust within me, I took a trip to a distant town of New York State, procured a fine, blooded mare, and repeated the experiment which had lost me the friendship of Guarneresi and my Parisian contemporaries.

"All in vain. Out of the hideous slaughter of the animal I obtained only a single grim picture—a canvas which I painted weeks later, when the shudder of revulsion in my frame had died down somewhat. I called the picture 'CANNIBALISM,' for it showed African savages gorging themselves on human flesh. It never sold, for the instant I placed it on exhibition the art censors of New York threw it under ban—and, I believe, no one really wanted the thing in his house.

"I did not like it myself, and finally, after much urging by my wife, I burned it. This sacrifice, however, merely accentuated the fury in my heart. I *must* do better than that!

"Since I have told you of my other periods of frenzy and self-hatred, I may pass over the ensuing month. One day the in-

spiration for my last great picture came, and as with the second, through pure accident. Beatrice was cutting weeds in the garden with a sickle, while I sat cross-legged beside her, watching. I always could find surcease from discontent in being near her, and watching the fine play of animal forces in her supple body.

"The sickle slipped. Beatrice cried out, and I jumped to place a handkerchief over the wound that lay open on her wrist, but not before my eyes had caught the sight of the red blood bubbling out upon her satiny skin.

"A madness leaped into my soul. My fingers trembled and a throbbing made itself felt in my temples as I laved on antiseptic and bound a bandage over the wound. This was the logical, the inevitable conclusion! She was my mate; she was in duty bound to furnish inspiration for the picture I must paint, my *masterpiece*.

"I, OF COURSE, told Beatrice nothing of what was passing in my mind, but went immediately about my preparations.

"I placed a cot in the studio, fastening strong straps to it. Then I made ready a gag, and sharpened a keen Weiss knife I possessed until its edge would cut a hair at a touch. Last I made ready my canvas.

"She came at my call. At first, when I seized her and tore off her clothing she thought me joking, and protested, laughing. When I came to placing the gag, and bound her arms and legs with strong straps, however, the terror of death began to steal into her dark eyes.

"To show her that I loved her still, no matter what duty impelled me to do, I kissed her hair, her eyes, her breast. Then I set to work. . . .

"In a few minutes I was away and painting as I never had painted before. A red stream dripped from the steel cot, down to the floor, and ran slowly toward where I stood. It elated me. I felt the fire of a fervor of inspiration greater than ever had beset me. I painted. *I painted!* This was my masterpiece.

"Drunk with the fury of creation, I threw myself on the floor in the midst of the

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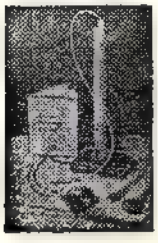

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red puddle time and time again. I even dipped my brushes in it. Mad with the delight of unstinted accomplishment, I kept on and on, until late in the evening I heard my little daughter crying in her room for the dinner she had not received. Then I went downstairs, laughing at the horror I saw in the faces of the servants.

"They found Beatrice, of course. The servants 'phoned immediately for the police. I fooled them all, however. I knew that they might do something to me, such is the lack of understanding against which true artists always must labor, so I took the canvas of my masterpiece and hid it in a secret cupboard in the wall known only to myself. I did not care what they did to me, but this picture, for which Beatrice had offered up her love and life, was sacred.

"They came and took me away. Then ensued a terrible scandal, and some foolish examinations of me in which I took not the slightest interest. And then they put me here.

"I have not been in duress all the time, though. Oh, no! Three years later some of my old friends contrived at escape, and secreted me away to the South Seas. There they gave me a studio, meaning to allow me to paint. I was guarded, though. They would not allow me full freedom.

"I painted, but I have not the slightest idea what was done with those canvases. I had no interest in them personally. All I could think of now was the one great masterpiece hidden in the cupboard of my old studio. I wanted to see it, to glory in the flame of color and in the tremendous conception itself.

"AT LAST I gave my guards the slip, and after long wandering about in native proas, made my way to this country again, to New York. I found the canvas, and, rolling it, secreted it upon my person. Then I went out and gave myself up to them. I was brought here again.

"Imprisonment was not important to me any more. I was getting old. Though I would like to be released now it is a matter of less urgency than before, because I have with me always my masterpiece. *See!*"

The old man tugged at something inside his blouse, and brought forth a dirtied roll which he unsnapped with fingers that trembled in eagerness.

"See, Madame!" he repeated triumphantly.

And, before my horrified eyes, he unrolled *a blank square of white canvas!*

The Eyrie

(*Continued from page 6*)

s-f having a social meaning, and predicting "The World of Tomorrow Today," but say that though I like fantasy, I like s-f even better.

Morton D. Paley,
New York, N. Y.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Just a few remarks concerning the artwork in WEIRD TALES. *I have been a reader of* WEIRD TALES *for the past six years, and have long regarded it as my favorite magazine, not entirely because of the excellence of the stories published therein, although the average has been high, but also because of the* atmosphere *surrounding the magazine. And much of this atmosphere has been due to the eerie nature and high quality of the illustrations.*

Nowadays, however, it seems that the standard is falling. In the March issue there was only one drawing in the whole magazine by Boris Dolgov, who is easily the best artist appearing in WEIRD TALES.

On the other side, however, you have recently introduced a couple of artists who show great promise; Eberle and Jon Arfstrom. These two, together with Dolgov, would make up an excellent art staff. Dolgov has turned out several of the finest covers you have ever had, and Frank Kelley Freas, in his only appearance, produced a really distinguished painting. Bill Wayne is usually adequate, but little more. Perhaps

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Eberle or Arfstrom could turn out some covers.

James D. Sutherland,
Richmond, Virginia.

Another cover by Frank Kelley Freas next issue. And an Eberle and an Arfstrom in the future. Also inside illustrations by these artists.—Editor, WEIRD TALES.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

When I was a boy of fourteen (I am now a grown-up college freshman) I read WT ardently. Then I became culture *conscious and dropped it. Now in college, I find my English instructor devoting a whole lecture on it in relation to other fantasy magazines. His point was that WT is the only magazine entitled to call itself fantastic in the vein of Poe and Stevenson (of* The Bottle Imp *and* Dr. Jekyll). *So I am again an avid WT reader.*

I have some suggestions and opinions I would like to express. First, your covers—they're wonderful. Why can't you continue the excellence of these throughout WEIRD? *Years ago when I first read WT I was impressed by the illustrations. The creatures (human or otherwise) were always tall and spindly and very much distorted. This added to the* WEIRDness. *Also, I agree with those readers whose plea is for stories that make you bite your nails and that chill your marrow.*

Anyway, I like our mag and prefer the shorter stories.

Ronald Morris,
Berkeley, California.

BOOKS RECEIVED

The Illustrated Man by Ray Bradbury • The blurb on the jacket of this book says Bradbury broke into writing in the "pulp magazines," but we regard Bradbury as distinctly a WEIRD TALES discovery. "The Illustrated Man" carries on the Bradbury tradition of imaginative tales of space, time and beauty, set into an ingenious frame.

The Days of the Triffids by John Wyndham • This is really a good action story and it is also worthy science fiction. The Triffids were plants that could walk; they walked on London and the author proclaims that only our children's children will be able to drive them back again. Realism and fantasy in one package.

Solution T-25 by Theodore DuBois • Once more a group of people are trying to push the vast world weight of circumstances, and repel an enemy that attacked so violently and swiftly that few Americans were left alive. Solution T-25 was a weapon so fantastic it couldn't possibly succeed. Its story is written by a mystery story writer whose talents turn quite successfully to science fiction.

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